

Building Skills, Building Homes: Community Sustainability, Straw Bale
Construction, and Indigenous Perspectives

A Thesis Submitted
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for the Degree of Master of Continuing Education
in the Department of Educational Foundations
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ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry explores how the Building Skills, Building Homes Project, which was undertaken in Saskatchewan, Canada from April – November 2003, exemplified a learning strategy for self-sustainable community development through the straw bale construction of two buildings. Being self-sustainable involves searching for an interconnected way of living with our environment. Finding a strategy that connects what is ecologically sound, such as straw bale construction, with current modes of living, is a complex process that necessitates new kinds of community education relationships. A retrospective analysis of the author's experience with the project and a conversational interview with one of the participants of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project will illustrate the adult learning that happens between learners working together on a joint project, which facilitates a growing awareness of what self-sustainable living entails.

The research question framing this study is: What links can community educators make using the Building Skills, Building Homes Project as an example of ecological community sustainability?

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DEDICATION

To my family, who make many sacrifices in order for me
to achieve my goals in the short term so that together we may realize our
dreams in the long term.

Thank you to Vince, Alex, Gaia, & Nitanis.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
The Thesis Structure	4
CHAPTER ONE: The Building Skills, Building Homes Project.....	8
History and Development of the Building Skills Building Homes Project	12
CHAPTER TWO: Sarah's Narrative: A Voice Other than My Own Speaks	27
Sarah's Narrative	32
Identifying the Issues	37
CHAPTER THREE: Collaborative Narrative Inquiry: Process, Issues, and Theory	39
The Process of Choosing a Method.....	40
Narrative Inquiry as Method	44
Theoretical Foundations	47
CHAPTER FOUR: Community Sustainability: Striving for a Sense of Place	55
Affordable Housing: Including Ecological Concerns	59
Ecologically Sustainable Lifestyles: Matters of Choice	63

Energy	66
Space	69
Place.....	71
Indigenous Perspectives: Rekindling the Old Ways	74
Learning and Unlearning: Two Examples	79
Re-thinking human waste	79
Re-thinking Praxis	82
CHAPTER FIVE: Community Sustainability: The Global Influences of Economic	
Development	85
Formative Notions of Development.....	86
United States.....	86
Canada	92
International Voices	94
Indigenous Voices.....	97
Shifting to Community Development and Community Education	98
The Eco-Connection and Sustainable Development.....	103
Shifts in Understandings: Making the Links to Community Sustainability.....	107
CHAPTER SIX: Implications for Community Sustainability: Linkages, Limits, and	
Locality.....	112
Linkages	114
Limitations	117
Locality	121

BIBLIOGRAPHY 124

APPENDIX A..... 136

 Ethics Approval.....136

APPENDIX B..... 138

 Letters of Consent138

APPENDIX C..... 144

 Sample Group Agreement.....144

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The vault cabin at Kissimmee Lake site, near Shell Lake, Saskatchewan.....	19
Figure 2: The Loo With A View - Roofing the load-bearing strawbale structure at the Brightwater Science and Environment Centre. Pictured from left to right: Carol Vandale, Alison Ledoux, Kandi Moccasin, and Debra Moccasin (inside the rafters).	23

INTRODUCTION

Go to the people. Live among them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what you know. Build on what they have. But of the best leaders when their task is done, the people will remark: "We have done it ourselves."

(Prakash & Esteva, 1998)

The words of Prakesh and Esteva capture what I wanted to accomplish in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. The Building Skills, Building Homes Project was a six-month work experience program that offered eleven women an opportunity to learn how to build with ecologically natural materials while living within an atmosphere of community and cultural awareness. This opportunity intended to build a kind of sustainable knowledge of our ecology that the women, the stakeholders, and I, as researcher, could take into our lives in a practical and real way. Working and learning together on straw bale construction is a practical means of achieving this aim. David Orr (1992) writes, "the goal of ecological competence implies a different kind of education and a different kind of educational experience that develops the practical art of living well in particular places" (p. 84). Ecological competence is the ability to acquire knowledge of our environment and how to live in it along with the experience of what it means to our community and our identity. I wanted to work with these

people, not only to construct buildings, but, also, to seek enduring ways to live in our communities. I wanted the experience of this project to develop our ecological competence. That is, we were to develop a more profound understanding of ecological sustainability through a hands-on experience building co-operatively with natural materials.

The purpose of my study is to demonstrate how the Building Skills, Building Homes Project experience, consistent with an adult education approach of lifelong learning, advanced the possibility of ecological community sustainability. Community education occurs through project-oriented or through the ongoing learning activities of a community, that is a neighbourhood, town, or self-identified group. Community education happens where those activities, formal or informal, are designed to better the lives of the people involved (Clover et al., 2000; Dean et al., 2000; Ewert & Grace, 2000; Foley, 1999; M. Mayo, 1997; Merrill, 1999; Oliver, 1999; Tett, 1996). Community sustainability for the community educator encompasses formal and informal modes of learning that incorporate environmental, cultural, and social issues.

Community sustainability is about the ability of a community to incorporate ecological, economic, social, and cultural issues in their policies, programs, and lifestyles. Community sustainability takes place where such actions aspire to maintain a balance of interdependence as opposed to dependency on or isolation from outside sources for their subsistence. The Building Skills, Building Homes Project intended to better the lives of the participants by increasing their

construction skills (for example, laying foundations, framing, plastering, and roofing), while at the same time providing them with the opportunity to be immersed in an experience that focused on the aims of ecologically sustainable lifestyles.

My thesis focuses on the experience of two adult learners from the Building Skills, Building Homes Project, Sarah Lewis, a participant in the project, and myself. In the process, Sarah and I reveal the barriers and limitations that accompany the quest for self-sustainable lifestyle alternatives. Ecological educators (Fox, 2000; Orr, 1992, 1994, 2002; Sumner, 2003) have begun incorporating community sustainable principles; they are actively searching for an interconnected way of living with our environment. Finding a learning strategy that connects what is ecologically sound with modern modes of living is a complex process that necessitates creating new ways of relating within communities. The complexity of such a process, along with new learning relationships, was illuminated by the Building Skills, Building Homes Project and is examined in this thesis. This process along with an analysis of the issues raised lead to new analysis, including new research and knowledge. As David Orr (1992) stated the need for an ecological competence grounded in a specific place is what leads us to live well in this land.

The Thesis Structure

The purpose of the Introduction has been to provide the reader with a general overview of the thesis. Chapter 1 tells the story of how I came to choose the topic of community sustainability in the context of ecologically sound practices as well as to articulate the process of writing this thesis. The Building Skills Building Homes Project is the central experience that gives a framework through which I was able to explore how community sustainability might work. The background section gives a chronological description of what the project was about and what it accomplished as well as those who were involved with the project.

However, I am not alone in the process of analyzing my experience of this project. Chapter 2 engages the reader in a collaborative narrative with Sarah Lewis, one of the participants of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. Sarah is a single mother who has a dream to build her own energy efficient home. Through a collaboratively written narrative, Sarah shares about what she learned from her involvement in the project. In this regard, Chapter 2 sets the scene and establishes the relevance for a praxis oriented case study approach by sharing the retrospective reflective process immediately with the reader. The narrative is based on a conversational interview between Sarah Lewis and I as well as informal conversations and revision work with her on the narrative. Sarah's narrative, as well as mine presented in Chapter 1 expresses

our understanding of how the project shaped our awareness of, and commitment to, alternative lifestyle practices as well as bringing forth questions that shaped the analysis.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach to my study. Here, I elaborate on the use of narrative inquiry to simultaneously present the data as well as the process for coming to such a presentation of both the data and the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. I clarify the reasons for use of the narrative in Chapter 2 as a way to understand the experience and to provide a basis from which specific issues are raised. I explain in Chapter 3 that Sarah's narrative is a collaborative effort based on a taped conversational interview (van Manen, 1990), previous informal conversations, and our experience of the project. I then discuss the use of analysis as a way to deal with the issues that were identified in the discussion of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project and Sarah's narrative. I explain how several methodological approaches, influenced the way I approached my participation in the project as well as providing me with a way to deal with the analysis of the issues that arose from the interaction of Sarah and myself.

Chapters 4 and 5, present two levels of analysis drawing the reader from the personal account, depicted in Chapters 1 and 2, to the local or community context in Chapter 4 and on to the international level of concern taken up in Chapter 5. Chapter 4, therefore, analyzes the relevant local issue of affordable housing mentioned in the collaborative narrative of Chapter 2. Local affordable

housing planning calls for “innovative and creative” (City of Saskatoon, 2003, p. 19) accommodation for homeless and disadvantaged people. I argue that such innovation and creativity should include building methods, such as building with straw bales, which are a safe, energy efficient, and cost-effective means of living. I claim that affordable housing needs to include principles and values of community sustainability that promotes environmentally friendly (sustainable) housing. The aim of Chapter 4 is to provide a discussion of how the innovative techniques of straw bale design and construction could be more included in the housing industry. As such, the chapter provides documentation of the links between affordable housing initiatives and energy and construction alternatives offered by local community-based economic development organizations.

Community development organizations and the myriad of issues they deal with have a history and are deeply influenced by the very formative and pervasive concept of economic development. Chapter 5 investigates the roots of global economic development from its origins and how it has impacted lives of many peoples around the world in its relatively short life in modern human society. This chapter shows how different sectors of society have attempted to reshape the notion of development from a quest for purely economic goals to include more communally, culturally, and ecologically oriented realities.

Community-based organizations (community organizing), indigenous peoples (decolonization), education (community education), and most recently, ecological groups (sustainable development) are the four aspects that will be

explored in terms of how they challenge the individualistic, materialistic, and industrialistic pursuits of global economic development.

Chapter 6 examines how the Building Skills, Building Homes Project is a good example of the kind of community-based projects that could be included, for example, the new education policy of School ^{Plus} in Saskatchewan. This chapter also discusses some of the limits of what can be done as a result of what was learned through this project. Finally, the question is posed as to the readiness for attending to the concerns stated in this thesis within our locale.

CHAPTER ONE: The Building Skills, Building Homes Project

If the local culture cannot preserve and improve the local soil, then, as both reason and history inform us, the local community will decay and perish, and the work of soil building will be resumed by nature.

(Wendell Berry in Prakash, 1994, p. 149)

I live in subsidized housing. I dream of having my own home and of others owning their own homes. I want to build mine out of ecologically friendly materials, providing shelter for my family while not intentionally and unnecessarily destroying the environment around it. I want, one day, to be able to say that I built a dwelling for my family and myself that is ecologically self-sustainable; to develop the practical art of living well in a particular place within a community of equally committed people.

I became involved in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project because of my dream. I realize my dream is far away, and will only be achieved with many years of work and commitment. The Building Skills, Building Homes Project is but one step in actualizing my dream.

What better way to learn about building such alternative sustainable structures, of which straw bale is one of many viable options,¹ than to be part of a project that pulled together many diverse groups of people to expose us to the possibilities of natural building. Such alternatives include cordwood, adobe, and stackwall construction. Yet, many homeowners, it seems, do not question the effect our current North American lifestyles have on society or the environment worldwide. Such questions are raised, for example, by ecological educators as David Orr (1994), Jennifer Sumner (2003), and Gregory Cajete (2001). I am part of a growing number of people who are not only questioning our impact on other nations and our planet, but are making personal life decisions to do something about that.

During my first term in the Master's Program, it occurred to me that the Building Skills, Building Homes Project could be an opportunity not only to gain knowledge about community education processes but also to learn new skills through the hands-on experience of building straw bale structures. Through my community involvement, I knew that I was not alone in the desire for an ecologically sustainable lifestyle. A parallel value that shapes many self-sustainable projects and lifestyles is their communitarian nature. Creating the

¹. For examples from other countries see: <http://www.strawbale.com.au>, <http://www.baubiologie.at/ISBBC/> , and <http://www.ecobusinesslinks.com/default.htm> . See the following web sites for Canadian information: http://www.greenhomebuilding.com/natural_building.htm , <http://www.archibio.qc.ca> , <http://www.ecobuildings.net/index.php> , <http://www.auraborealis.com/ldabout.html>

opportunity, through this project, to build a community of people interested in experiencing alternative ways of living was very important to me.

As far as my role is concerned, my intention was to be a leader as in the words and intent of Freire (2000):

The leaders do bear the responsibility for coordination and, at times, direction – but leaders who deny praxis to the oppressed thereby invalidate their own praxis. (p. 107)

I resolved to stay away from leadership that is isolated from people and enacted with authoritarian tactics. Overall, my role was as co-ordinator of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project, allowing various people to work, teach, and interact throughout the project. As coordinator of the project, my essential role was to engage the women through dialoguing with them about what they were learning. I did this through conducting talking circles, group meetings, and teaching them about work ethics, attitudes, values, communication, and respect. I worked alongside them as they constructed the two straw bale structures.

I involved them in cooking, cleaning, meal planning, and time management skills development. However, as well as coordinating the project and assisting with the construction, my role included assuming camp cook duties. Although I loved cooking, these duties were problematic because the additional tasks of cooking interfered with the amount of time I was able to spend with the women discussing their concerns.

Nevertheless, I encouraged them to realize the importance of their participation. There were many good encounters. It was exciting to observe the keen enthusiasm in the natural building opportunity shared by each of the participants. During this project two straw bale buildings were constructed and there was a constant stream of interest and inquiries by people from neighbouring communities, nearby First Nation's communities (for example, Mistawasis, Ahtahkakoop, and Whitefish), and people in nearby urban centres of Saskatoon and Prince Albert. Yet, I wrestled with the challenges that were presented during this project. I grappled with how important it is to capitalize on the resources, human as well as environmental, that we have available. I learned what it means to trust what works within our own localized knowledge base and what "outside" information best suits our environment.

I involved myself completely in the program and I identified with the women participating in this project, who lack affordable housing and adequate employment opportunities. I struggled with the participants to build a structure and a community of people committed to alternative ways of living.

Although, the two straw bale structures were not completed immediately,² and only four the participants completed the program, the measures of success go beyond these criteria alone. I feel strongly that the impact of this project on the people and communities involved was a remarkable, if awkward, first step in developing relationships between diverse

². Of the two structures that were part of the *Building Skills, Building Homes* Project the "Loo with a View" was officially opened in 2005.

communities. During the project, I strove to explain to the participants and other leaders what my role as researcher meant in this context. I did not intend to observe them or analyze them but to present the work that was done together.

History and Development of the Building Skills Building Homes Project

In early 2002, Quint Development Corporation (a community-based organization concentrating on housing and local economic development initiatives) designed a work-experience program called the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. The project was designed to empower unemployed women by providing them with employable skills through involvement in the construction of ecologically sustainable structures. I was hired to assist in the implementation of this project. Unfortunately, the project was cancelled due to a forest fire at the selected building site near Shell Lake, Saskatchewan.

Given my commitment to community education, adult learning, and ecologically sustainable development, I decided to pursue the creation of a similar project in the following year. In December 2002, I approached Tyler Rendek and Dianne Menagre, original designers of the project, for permission to take on the project. They were unable to attempt it again due to other work commitments but were encouraged to have me lead the project. In January of 2003, I began the process of developing another proposal for funding for the

project. Tyler supervised that effort as part of a work-place learning course, a requirement of the master's program. Also in January, I approached Marcia Klein, Program Leader of the Brightwater Science and Environment Centre, a program of the Saskatoon Public School Division, and invited her to submit another proposal with me for the project. Along with the involvement and assistance of numerous partners, Marcia and I developed the project proposal from January to April 2003.

This project came together because of the concern and dedication of many people who formed a partnership for this initiative. There were four working partners who contributed funds, energy, and significant resources to the project. The Saskatoon Public School Division³ agreed to sponsor the project and provided in-kind contributions of administrative support, human resource expertise, and leadership training. The Saskatoon Public School Division, whose mandate it is to work with students under the age of 21 pursuing Grade 12 matriculation, supports projects like this that assist people who are finding the school-to-work transition difficult. In fact, one of the criteria for applicants was that they could be out of school for a period of time. As well, the age of applicants (17 – 30 years of age) also included some young women still within the division's educational mandate.

³. For further information on this school division see:
<http://www.sbe.saskatoon.sk.ca/>.

The second working partner and the principal funding agency, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada⁴, provided operational funds and a living allowance for the participants. The program to which we applied for funding is called the Youth Employment Strategy, specifically the community services project funding. The goal, as stated in their website, was to allow “experienced community-based organizations develop and implement community service projects to help young people acquire valuable job and life skills, while strengthening their sense of accomplishment and their attachment to the community” (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2003b).

The third working partner was the Prairie Institute for Human Ecology, a “non-profit community learning organization with over a decade of experience in offering low or no cost education in the area of social and environmental sustainability . . . [specializing] in the area of appropriate, alternative building skills, especially construction using strawbales” (Oliphant, 2003). Leaders in this organization provided both the site and the materials for the first vault building, as well as offering teaching and leadership support throughout the project.

The fourth working partner was Mistawasis First Nation. Located near Shell Lake, the leaders of Mistawasis are expanding their community economic development with numerous projects including a culture and recreation centre,

⁴ For further information on current programs and funding offered by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada see: <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/epb/yi/yep/newprog/yesprogras.shtml&hs=yze>.

as well as ecologically oriented tourism experiences. The leadership of this community is very interested in developing and expanding their knowledge in natural building as an alternative to contemporary designs. Leaders from Mistawasis wanted to build a straw bale resource centre in their First Nation's community. However this was too ambitious a venture to include in our project. Nevertheless, they provided an opportunity for the women in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project to witness this community's interest in ecologically sustainable alternatives to energy and housing. Their interest served to legitimate the women's involvement, from a First Nation's perspective, in the project as well as to provide them with an opportunity to participate in the initial planning stages for a straw bale resource centre.

In addition to the four "working" partners, there were six support partner organizations that provided community endorsement as well as resource personnel for various workshops offered throughout the project. They are as follows⁵:

➤ CHEP Good Food Inc.

CHEP Good Food Inc. is a community-based, food security organization concerned with raising awareness and offering affordable programs for all people to access nutritional and, where possible, local food.

⁵. The web sites for these organizations are as follows: <http://www.chep.org>, <http://www.extension.usask.ca/ExtensionDivision/noncredit/Indig/index.htm>, www.quintsaskatoon.ca, <http://www.environmentalsociety.ca/redirect.html>,

- Indigenous People's Program, Extension Division, University of Saskatchewan.

This department works primarily with organizations and institutions interested in providing educational opportunities and promoting programs focused on the improvement of social and economic conditions of Indigenous peoples locally and globally.

- Quint Development Corporation

Quint is a community-based, economic development organization committed to providing affordable housing to low-income families. They offer home ownership housing co-operatives plus numerous other housing and economic diversification initiatives.

- Saskatchewan Environmental Society.

The SES is a non-profit, registered charity whose mandate is to work towards a world in which all needs are met in sustainable ways. Sustainability will require healthy ecosystems, healthy livelihoods, and healthy human communities.

- Saskatchewan Eco-Network

SEN is an organization that connects environmentalists with each other, both within the province of Saskatchewan and across Canada, by promoting active networking among member groups.

<http://www.econet.sk.ca/pages/about.html>, and
<http://www.saskwastereduction.ca>.

➤ Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council.

The SWRC is a non-profit organization striving to promote waste reduction in all sectors of the province of Saskatchewan.

I accepted the position of co-ordinator of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project from April 28 to November 28, 2003. Initially, 10 women were selected for participation in the project. An eleventh participant was accepted later in the program. The selection team consisted of Marcia Klein, program leader of the Brightwater Science and Environment Centre, Karley Scott-Rosowski, resource officer from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and myself.

Building Skills, Building Homes, then, was a unique project that was to give unemployed women the opportunity to work as apprentices with skilled teacher-builders from the alternative building industry. As well as basic carpentry skills, the women were to be trained to be in numerous ecologically sustainable building methods based on designs such as yurts, vaults, and load-bearing straw bale structures. These buildings would incorporate unique materials such as straw bales, cob (a mud plaster), and recycled lumber. The participants were to learn about alternative lifestyle practices including the use of solar power, and environmentally friendly water and waste management practices. These practices emphasized the use of materials and technologies particularly suited to the northern prairies. Participants were to learn about co-operative land ownership and the potential for communities to work together to

access and develop homes for all people. Finally, in order to facilitate entry into the job market, the participants were to spend time developing their career goals and job search techniques as specified in the following account of how the project was to be implemented.

The project had four phases. The first phase focused primarily on training the women to work together in a labour environment. It also involved supporting them to live together communally as they would be working and living together in a camp environment outside of Saskatoon for the second phase. Four resource groups from the community offered instruction in the following areas:

- Food Safe Workshop offered by Saskatoon District Health
- Food Nutrition offered by the Child Hunger and Education Program
- First Aide and CPR offered by St. John's Ambulance Training
- Tool Safety offered by the Salvation Army Camp Manager

Also during this phase, the participants and I developed a Group Agreement. A document was produced that was signed by each participant. This agreement addressed individual and group issues such as work hours, payment schedules, as well as work and community living expectations (see Appendix C for sample agreement).

The second phase of the project focused on building one of two straw bale structures at the Kissimmee Lake site near Shell Lake, Saskatchewan⁶ approximately 1½ hours northeast of Saskatoon. Here the women learned essential construction techniques. Without the use of electricity or running

⁶ For more information see: http://www.rkc.ca/shell_lake/.

water, the women built a vault cabin with recycled lumber. Through the process of building this straw bale in-fill⁷ structure, the participants learned the basics of construction from foundations to pre-roofing phase (see Figure 1). During this phase, the participants, the instructors, and I lived in a community setting on site from Monday to Friday, returning to Saskatoon for the weekends.



Figure 1: The vault cabin at Kissimmee Lake site, near Shell Lake, Saskatchewan

This phase of the project entailed setting up camp at a rural and new place for most of the women. Ten of the eleven participants were Aboriginal and, although identifying with rural First Nation communities, they had lived most of their lives in cities like Saskatoon and were not used to living in the

⁷ Straw bale in-fill is a term indicating that bales are used as insulation as distinct bales that contribute to the structure of a building as in the case of a load-bearing structure (Lacinski & Bergeron, 2000, chapter 6 & 7).

bush. The first week of June was rainy and chilly. The inclement weather and the hard labour of clearing the land were taxing on all the participants and leaders. The daily schedule generally consisted of early morning construction work, mid-day siestas, and more work in the later, cooler, part of the day. The women and the leaders, who consisted of teacher-builders, stakeholders, and myself, were tested in our ability to live in community for this period of time. Despite the ups and downs one might expect to experience living communally, the women completed the shell of a fine vault cabin.⁸

Construction of the straw bale vault was not the only focus of the experience at the Kissimmee Lake site. In addition, there were numerous cultural and life skills experiences offered to augment the programming. Near the beginning of the construction, Cree elders, Maria and Walter Linklater came to share with us the importance of the land and the work these women were doing. Ceremonies are often held at the beginning of processes to ask for guidance and support from the ancestors. As well, extra time during and between construction periods allowed for educational and cultural workshops such as:

- Sweat ceremony offered by Tony Sands, Elder Mistawasis First Nation
- Hunting and tracking workshop offered by Glenn Ahenakew, Hunter from Ahtahkakoop First Nation
- Birding workshop offered by Lynn Oliphant, Prairie Institute for Human Ecology
- Herbal salves workshop offered by Rebecca Kennel, Herbologist from Shell Lake, Saskatchewan
- Hide tanning workshop offered by Mary Lee, Elder

⁸. More details on methods of straw bale construction are provided in Chapter 4.

The third phase of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project (August 18 to October 15) was the construction of the second straw bale structure which was built at the Brightwater Science and Environment Centre. The Centre, operated by the Saskatoon Public School Division (SPSD)⁹ is located 20 minutes south of Saskatoon. The Brightwater program is an Out-of-School¹⁰ education program provided by the Saskatoon Public School Division for both middle years (grade six to eight) and high school students (grade nine to twelve). The instructive programs offered at Brightwater help inspire and sustain learning in the areas of science and environment education. The philosophy of the Brightwater Centre meshes well with the educational philosophy of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. As such, the Brightwater Centre offered the perfect environment for our participants to continue their education.

⁹. This land is adjacent to the Salvation Army Camp and both sites are used to run ecological and science oriented programming for children, youth and adult groups, from the public school system and other educational related facilities interested in outdoor education opportunities. (Saskatoon Public School Division, 2005)

¹⁰. Educational programming that extends the boundaries of "teaching and learning beyond the school classroom" is referred to as being "out-of-school".

During this phase, the women learned how to build a load-bearing, straw bale structure. This particular structure was designed specifically to house two composting toilets and was dubbed A Loo With a View (see Figure 2).¹¹ While at Brightwater, the women continued to learn basic carpentry skills necessary for the mainstream construction industry and the women became proficient with some power tools such as skill saws and drills. The women and I drove together to Brightwater each workday. Despite being very fortunate to have a warm dry fall that year, progress was slowed due to the withdrawal of 7 participants from the program for personal reasons or to take advantage of other training opportunities.

The experience at Brightwater was enriched through the extra challenges that were presented to the women when groups of visiting children, teachers, and parents came through the site asking many thoughtful questions. In order to help the participants meet these new challenges Marcia Klein provided leadership and group facilitation training for the participants. The women were able to apply this teaching almost immediately as they were called upon to conduct tours and teaching sessions for the numerous groups that came to visit.

¹¹. For a good discussion of strawbale construction in Canada see *Serious straw bale: a home construction guide for all climates* (Lacinski & Bergeron, 2000). For a description of one of the composting toilets used at Brightwater see: <http://www.sun-mar.com/>. The other composting toilet was a passive solar design by one of the teacher/builders, Craig Shearer. This straw bale design and the relevance of the composting toilets will be further discussed in Chapter 4.



Figure 2: The Loo With A View - Roofing the load-bearing strawbale structure at the Brightwater Science and Environment Centre. Pictured from left to right: Carol Vandale, Alison Ledoux, Kandi Moccasin, and Debra Moccasin (inside the rafters).

The fourth phase of the project occurred from October 18 to November 20. The purpose of this phase was to enable the women to generalize the learning acquired throughout the practical experiences of building the two structures and apply that learning to their individual goals. This learning was done through the development of a PowerPoint presentation with which the participants shared their experience, through pictures and story, with all stakeholders and people interested in the project. To enable the women to make the transition from the program to the next phases of their lives, we focused on looking at their individual talents, career goals and training or education needs or desires. I facilitated job searching and group building

sessions for the women. As well, I assisted them individually with resume writing, career counseling, and arranging meetings or one-day placements with prospective employers.

The Building Skills, Building Homes Project encouraged learning, reflection, and growth through participation in various workshops, gatherings, and teachings. For example, involvement in the sweat ceremony was a particularly profound experience for all of us. This broader, more holistic approach promotes lifelong learning, which is highly valued by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada as it is considered to be key to entering and maintaining a career (2003a). More than this such a lifelong learning approach also encourages the women to experience and reflect upon living with a strong sense of place, identity, and culture. As Edmund O'Sullivan (1999) states, "the depth of our need for a sense of place is akin to what other members of the natural world experience as a stable habitat. Although human beings appear to be incredibly flexible in their living arrangements, we nevertheless need a place to satisfy our needs for protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity and freedom" (p. 245). Other writers who address the importance of a sense of place include Vitek and Jackson (1996), and Smith (1999).

The women were encouraged the women to expand their life skills in numerous ways. This fostering of life skills is an aspect of culture that is understood as "together-living" (Forbes, 2001) where many Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal people consider culture to be an on-going and generative process of expression as opposed to a static or normative dimension of human experience. As such, the learning of life skills that allow for “together-living” provides the opportunity for the continued generation of an increasingly enriched cultural experience.¹² Opportunities for growth in “together-living” were provided by experiences offered to the participants by members from the community.

- Group communication, family tree/history, cultural teachings, and colonization offered by Yvonne Howse, Professor, First Nation’s University of Canada
- Iskweweyak Young Women’s Leadership Workshop offered by Priscilla Sette, Director, Indigenous People’s Program, University of Saskatchewan
- Leadership preparation for two Open Houses at each site offered by Carol Vandale and Teacher-Builders
- Two group process days spent developing a Group Agreement for each build site offered by Carol Vandale

The program provided rich, intense, and diverse life experiences that changed the lives of these women, increasing their sense of interdependence, building their capacity to work collectively, as well as giving them new options for living more self-sustainably. The women experienced growth in their construction, interpersonal, and life skills, particularly evident in Sarah’s narrative (Chapter 2) and because growth in these areas was considered to be

¹². Introducing the theoretical “together-living” concept here establishes a clear understanding of the approach to culture taken in this thesis. More discussion of this approach will be taken up in Chapter 4.

a foundational objective of the program, the Building Skills, Building Homes Project was very effective as a learning and training forum.

CHAPTER TWO: Sarah's Narrative: A Voice Other than My Own Speaks

Development should be development for the people and not for profit. Furthermore, it is not women and development, nor men and development, or Whites and development, nor Natives and development. It is people and development. Putting it the other way puts more barriers into the actual realizing that there is development going on and that people are not able to do anything about it, or people don't know how to deal with it. It must be people development. (Italics in text)

(Interviewee, Poelzer & Poelzer, 1986, p. 8)

In this chapter I present Sarah Lewis' narrative. Following her narrative I identify issues that are important to Sarah as well as some key issues that I perceive that we have in common. Those related issues of affordable housing and ecologically sustainable lifestyles are analyzed in depth in Chapters 4 and 5. As the quote above indicates authentic community development begins with the interest of the majority of people rather than starting from a concern for making profit. Sarah was one of the participants of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project who agreed to work with me to explore what the experience meant for both of us. Each of us wanted to learn how the issues, made apparent through the project, continued to be relevant to our lives. As Sarah expressed during the project, "I wonder how I can take this knowledge, this opportunity, to my

family, my people, and my community as a way to better our lives" (Fieldnotes, 2003, July 21). We agreed that we would meet after the project was finished to find ways of addressing her concern about applying the knowledge gained in a family and community context.

Sarah's narrative is about how the project facilitated the learning that happens through a growing awareness of what self-sustainable living entails. The poem quoted on page 1 states, "Go to the people. Live among them. Learn from them. . ." (Prakash & Esteva, 1998). As I interpret this poem, a voice other than my own speaks; Sarah through her narrative seeks to share what has been learned in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. Our common issue is affordable housing and that we identify that it is connected to ecologically sustainable community development. I then examine the struggles and learning that occur when two adult learners concerned about the environment and working together on a joint project attempt to form new relationships leading toward community sustainability. I then claim in Chapter 4 that the connection between sustainable development and affordable housing intersects with our dreams of having something more than just a house or just a job (see page 57).

After the project, our shared interests drew Sarah and I into further dialogue, allowing us to learn about sustainable housing possibilities not only through our participation in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project but also through the process of engaging in the academic process of qualitative

research. Together, we envision a tomorrow that is connected to our shared values about living more lightly on the land than we are currently able to do. We identify some of the barriers and frustrations that keep us from fulfilling that vision.

The process of working together to identify issues that are continuing to affect us after the experience is referred to as forward reflection, or in Alfred Schutz's (1970) words "motivational reflection" (p. 14). We are continuing the process of learning from our experience by meeting to reflect on how that experience continues to influence our lives. The collaborative research process is also phenomenological, which "aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Together our narratives and reflections, informed by a phenomenological perspective (Michael Collins, 1995) and while not adhering strictly to phenomenological methodology, are purposively recorded prior to the chapters on method and intend to set the stage for the thesis as a whole. Such a process of learning is confirmed by Connelly and Clandinin (1994) who state that:

As part of our educative experiences, we do awaken to the possibility of retellings, to new ways of telling our stories. The horizons of our knowing shift and change as we awaken to new ways of "seeing" our world, to different ways of seeing ourselves in relation to each other and to the world" (p. 155)

In this way I am encouraged to explore this collaboration with Sarah.

We know it will take years of hard work to acquire the knowledge (through the acquisition of appropriate construction skills and experience) and persistence of will to meet our goals for a more self-sustainable lifestyle. Working together on the Building Skills, Building Homes Project and this joint forward reflection has helped us clarify our understanding of the potential that this project provided for us a strategy towards a more sustainable way of living.

This collaborative retrospective reflection between two participants, that is, adult learners from the project, helps each of us acquire a fuller understanding of our decision to choose a different lifestyle, a different direction – that direction being towards ecological community sustainability. We have taken the time and energy to meet after the project was completed to reflect more carefully on the implications of our work with the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. The concerted effort to reflect upon our experience of the project has given us more solidarity of vision and a more substantial rationale for understanding why we are seeking more endurable alternative ways to live in our communities.

Paulo Freire, the internationally renowned adult educator, whose pedagogy promoted progressive social change at the grassroots, stated the following, “human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action” (Freire, 2000, p. 106). By including Sarah and her narrative, praxis is engaged more deeply and profoundly than normally so within a thesis. Praxis has been accomplished by experiencing the Building Skills, Building Homes Project and

converging that experience with the reflection on our practice. I feel that this continued reflection and analysis that Sarah and I shared was empowering, increasing the potential to improve our day-to-day lives.

Sarah's narrative is formatted to enhance the poetic cadence of her voice, which adds to the vitality and authenticity of what she has to say.

Sarah's Narrative

I want to build my own straw bale home for my family. I want to get a crew of builders together who are into natural or alternative construction. I want to learn about this kind of building so that my community, my people, can begin to learn about another way of life.

I know I would not feel as strongly about self-sustainable living if I had not had the experience of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. It gave me the opportunity to really learn, not just in my head, but with my hands, what this sustainable living is all about. I was also encouraged to involve my family and community in the experience. They are from the Pelican Lake First Nation¹ and they are also very interested in these different ways of building.

One of the drawbacks for me personally was the lack of childcare nearer the work site, so I could not be close to my child, Keannu, during the week, especially while we were at the Kissimmee Lake site. Childcare is an issue women always have to deal with when work takes them away from home.

During the project I had a struggle about taking another program that I thought would better my chances in the construction industry. I did not want to leave the project, but I felt I needed to take this other training in order to find work in the area of construction. However, I kept in touch with Carol and the project until its completion. In September, I joined the Women In Trades Program through the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology¹³ and learned construction skills. After this program was finished in December, it took awhile to find a job.

Finally, I found a job with a Métis organization, the Central Urban Métis Federation, Inc. (CUMFI)¹⁴, in Saskatoon. They were renovating some apartment buildings not far from where I live. The more I work in ordinary construction, the more I see how good it could be to combine the conventional with natural building techniques.

I want to continue to learn about alternative and ecologically sensitive ways of construction. Right now, though, I need to improve my carpentry skills. I want to get my journeyman carpentry certificate, and that requires a lot of hours of experience. I would like to continue learning and gaining experience in natural building methods, (like strawbale and mudding) and energy-efficient technologies (like solar and

¹³. See <http://www.siiit.sk.ca/>.

¹⁴. See the following website for more information about this housing project: <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/News/nere/2004/2004-10-12-0000.cfm>

wind power), but it is almost impossible to learn about these special areas in the city.

I do not drive or own a car, so it is harder for me to find work even in ordinary construction, much less leaving the city to find alternative construction opportunities, like the one at Craik¹⁵ or finishing the buildings at Shell Lake or Brightwater.

Still, I know that all natural building methods need a solid foundation in basic carpentry skills and building techniques, so I am satisfied with learning ordinary ways of building for now.

I am finding that being a woman is still a barrier to getting ahead in the carpentry industry. I was not given the same jobs as men beginning in the crew I worked with even though I worked as hard as they did. I have to work very hard to prove myself in construction.

At least I was able to learn and practice all kinds of carpentry skills during the *Building Skills, Building Homes* Project with other women, and I did not have to worry about the additional challenges of working

¹⁵ This is a large project with men. <http://www.craik.ca> and also see the article on this project at <http://prairiesnorth.com/> - follow back issues link to Vol. 6 No. 1

During the project Carol talked about things like “self-sustainable living” and “ecologically-friendly” ways of living. I do not think about words like these. Instead, my experience of the project helped me to see the importance and the possibility of renewing some of the old ways of my people. I would refer to “community sustainability”, the words Carol uses, as “the old ways”.

I do want to go back to the old way of living, before the white people came, but I know that is not possible. But I do want to live more gently on the land and not use so many of its resources wastefully. I want to use materials (like straw bale, mud plasters, and wood) from sources near to the building site. I would like solar or small wind power, because they do not affect water, air, or land environments.

It is not about doing away with everything we are used to living with (like electricity or other man-made things), but it is a way of being less wasteful with what we have.

For me, the old ways are the guiding principles and values that shaped our unique way of connecting to the world around us, our territory. We related to the land, which we owned and controlled in different ways. We learned from the environment – the animals, the plants, and the weather – how to live with the land that was our home. We survived this way for many thousands of years without needing electricity.

But now that electricity and man-made things exist, it is up to us to use them carefully and in a way that does not do further harm to the environment. For example, we still would need to use artificial materials to make solar panels and wind generators, but building with a material like straw bale as insulation, rather than fiberglass or foam, is an example for me of what it would mean to live the old ways. Straw bales come from straw that would otherwise be a waste product of farming. It is readily available, cheap, and has been shown to be safe and stable.¹⁶

There is not a big market for the skills I learned, although that would be nice. But I was there to learn something new and different and building a straw bale cabin certainly was all of that.

I think that the *Building Skills, Building Homes* Project was a good way of learning about a different kind of living. For the two and a half months that we spent our weekdays at Kissimmee Lake building the vault cabin, we worked, cooked, and lived together. Being together was an important part of learning. Even though some things were hard, like learning new skills, coping with cramped muscles, working outside in the heat and rain, and interacting with different people, it was better learning about something as different as self-sustainability as part of a community.

¹⁶. See <http://mha-net.org/html/sblinks.htm> for straw bale links and resources.

Identifying the Issues

For Sarah, learning construction skills and entering the work force, rekindling the old ways (values, as well as practical arts) of living, and bettering the life of her family and community are very important. I am also concerned about entering the work force, not as a carpenter, but as a community educator, aware of how my theoretical knowledge will affect my approach to teaching and leadership in community development work. However, as both our narratives indicate our reasons for entering the Building Skills, Building Homes Project had to do with our quest for ecologically sustainable lifestyles and affordable housing. It was in these two issues that I found common ground for beginning an analysis. We knew from our experience that the two issues of affordable housing and living ecologically sustainable lives are connected. Yet, I feel that due to a lack of vision in our society there are few opportunities to bring these two issues together.

Prakesh and Esteva (1998), as cited at the beginning of this thesis, encourage educators to go amongst the people. They tell us to live and work with them. Learn from them; and most of all find ways to do community development together. The Building Skills, Building Homes Project was an excellent opportunity, a way, and a tool for grappling with the issues of

affordable housing and ecologically sustainable living. The project provided Sarah and me with a way of learning and living so that we might help others to live more ecologically sustainable lives.

CHAPTER THREE: Collaborative Narrative Inquiry: Process, Issues, and Theory

To assume in advance that people will not be interested in, or will not understand, the deeper issues is arrogant. The challenge always is to demystify, to decolonize.

(Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.16)

On this reasonable assumption that people, in sincere dialogue, are motivated to understand each other (Habermas, 1984, 1987), the methodology of this thesis is based on narrative inquiry. However, I came to understand and choose this method as a part of a process of how a thesis requires a question to be researched, experienced, and reflected upon. The process of coming to choose a method is as important as the choice of method and the theory of that method. The method evolved along with the research, the Building Skills, Building Homes Project, and the thesis. Thus a number of methodological approaches informs this study including phenomenological (van Manen, 1990) and research in practice (Swann & Pratt, 2003) perspectives. Finally, narrative inquiry was chosen as a way to both present data and organize a response to that data.

The Process of Choosing a Method

As my research topic and project developed I had some ideas about methods I could use regarding my approach to conducting the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. Because I was constantly aware that the project might become the basis of my research, I was influenced by the theoretical perspectives of multiple research approaches throughout the experience of the project, which was informed in part by participatory action research.

Participatory action research methodology (Hall, 2001; Hall et al., 1982; Reason & Bradbury, 2001) presumes participation by people with pre-existing relationships amongst each other and who are already involved in a query of community issues. Budd Hall (2001) refers to participatory research in the following way:

Participatory research as a practice has always existed, whenever farmers, mothers, workers, the poor, the “pushed out” have struggled collectively to understand their contexts, learn about their worlds and take action to survive or, from time to time, to carve out some gains against the more powerful in our worlds. (p. 174)

Such involvement was not entirely the situation with the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. Because I did not know all the people involved in the project before it began I was not part of a pre-existing community; the community itself only came into existence because of the project. Thus, while I wanted my project to emulate the goals of participatory action research, the creation of the community through the project meant that one of the key criteria for participatory action research, that is, pre-existing communities out of which

concerns are developed and researched, was not met. Interestingly enough, participatory action research actually becomes part of the analysis, as the community of Sarah and myself became the ground out of which further analysis of the project played out as described in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Nevertheless, I did fully participate with the women in the program and in the construction, communal living, and teachings that occurred. I also live in the community in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, concerned with developing more affordable housing, which has been part of my motivation to take up this topic for my thesis. In the end, the influence of the participatory action research paradigm served to engage the women and I in an emancipatory exploration of our lifeworlds throughout the project and continuing specifically with Sarah Lewis.

I positioned myself as a researcher in the project with a methodological stance known as “educational research in practice”¹⁷. Swann and Pratt (2003) have recently edited a book called *Educational Research in Practice: Making Sense of Methodology*. In this edited book the contributors explore methodological issues and techniques that specifically advance an eclectic but

¹⁷ Research in Practice is a growing field of qualitative research especially in education. Some examples include: Atweh, B., Kemmis S., and Weeks P. Eds. *Action research in practice: partnerships for social justice in education*. London: Routledge, 1998. Quigley B.A., Kuhne G. Eds. *Creating practical knowledge through action research: posing problems, solving problems, and improving daily practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997. Merriam S. *Qualitative research in practice: examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2002. Alloway N. *Boys and literacy learning: changing perspectives*. Watson, ACT: Australian Early Childhood Association, 2002.

rigorous approach to educational analysis with the aim to both contribute to the improvement of educational practice and to find out more about practical aspects of education (pp. 5 & 12). Research in practice engages researchers in the practice or activity of practicing their profession, engaging with other practitioners, and qualitatively documenting those engagements. Using this stance I consciously and purposefully reflected on my practice as a community educator and organizer within the experience of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project.

Both the awareness of myself as researcher and the knowledge that the method would come from the experience prompted me to keep a journal during my involvement with the project. After the project was complete, I began to reflect on the best way to present my thoughts and concerns. The participatory action research method and educational research in practice (Swann & Pratt, 2003) influenced the design and implementation of the project. Both are embedded in life and interpretative rather than having discrete and prescriptive boundaries of classic social scientific research (Lincoln, 1998). However, neither of these approaches was central or pivotal in providing a structure in which to explore my research question.

I considered presenting the Building Skills, Building Homes Project as a case study. In many case studies, independent parties design and implement a project, while an “objective” researcher investigates the project. In this situation, I both designed and implemented the Building Skills, Building Homes

project. Case study is the examination of a particular venture as a “specific, complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 15). As Robert E. Stake (2000) clarifies, “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 435). It is in the study of a case that particular methods of research and analysis can be included.

The case study approach is identified by Stake as a structure that could be used to help identify the issues that arise from a case. Thus, the case provides the data for understanding the real question of the inquiry: What are the issues that arise for the participants? Stake is the primary guide for this study. Other sources such as (Yin, 1994), (Bassey, 2003), and (Merriam, 1998) are also instructive. Stake (1995) claims that it is issues and issue questions that provide the conceptual structure that draws attention to relevant problems and concerns in order to deal with the complexity and contextuality of the thesis question (p.16). Stake (1995) describes an issues-oriented approach in the following terms:

Issues draw us toward observing, even teasing out, the problems of the case, the conflictual outpourings, the complex backgrounds of human concern. Issues help us expand upon the moment, help us see the existence in a more historical light, help us recognize the pervasive problems in human interaction (p. 17).

However, it is not from the study of the case, that is, the Building Skills, Building Homes Project alone that the issues are brought to the attention of the reader. It is through the collaborative narrative process with Sarah Lewis that the issues emerge.

Case studies tend to give the impression that the researcher analyzes the case and brings forth the issues independently. As such, after the project I could have chosen to write about my learning experience but the community development issues arising out of the project were important outside of my learning alone. They were not just my issues. I knew that I needed another voice to corroborate my experience and the issues we felt were important. I wanted, in writing about the case, to allow the process of engagement to carry forward. In this regard I intended to continue the dialogical process of reflection emphasized by Freire in his discussion of praxis (2000).

Narrative Inquiry as Method

Narrative inquiry organizes the data and then relates to the reader the reflections of the researcher and, as in this case, the collaborating participant, Sarah Lewis. Narrative inquiry is a systematic frame in which to understand "ourselves and our worlds narratively, our attention is turned to how we are engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving our lives within particular social and cultural plotlines" (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 161). This framework also allowed for a more in-depth and personal approach as well as an awareness of how learning is constructed socially (Wason-Ellam, 1993) as a way to understand the thesis questions.

Ethics approval to interview Sarah was granted on June 11, 2004. The letter of approval, Consent Form, and Transcript Release Form are included in

Appendix A. This approval stated that the selected participant could be contacted, interviewed, and included as a collaborator in the writing of a narrative inquiry of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. Sarah Lewis gave her consent and wished to have her name used. The reason for using her name is to give actuality and due respect to her for her contribution. I picked Sarah because she, of all the women, asked questions about what this experience could do for her personal goals and her community. Other women did talk about the relevance of this experience for their community, but Sarah showed the most commitment to alternative building; carpentry became her choice of career as a result of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. Finally, she left the project only because she was accepted into a training program that offered certification leading to apprenticeship training. She continued to remain in contact with our project to its completion.

Sarah's formal involvement began with a taped interview, held on June 24, 2004. This interview was transcribed and given to Sarah. She agreed that it was accurate and signed the Transcript/Data Release Form. I then used this material, conversations, journal notes, and project files to formulate a narrative inquiry of the learning and issues we experienced during and after the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. As I relate in Chapter 4, this experience did reveal some unexpected perceptions. I shared the drafts and the revisions with Sarah, noting the changes and insights that she expressed.

Allowing Sarah to speak for herself in this way validates, expresses, and respects her experience as her own as well as showing how, through our interaction, learning occurs. Learning is active as well as transformative of self and community (Clover et al., 2000; Ewert & Grace, 2000; P. Mayo, 1999; O'Sullivan, 1999). Action in the Freirian sense involves learning and growing that happens when a new activity is decided upon and executed. Coupled with in-depth and analytic reflection such action can be transformative or can constitute praxis (Freire, 2000). Thus, reflection informs action and action informs theory. It is the intention of the narrative inquiry to continue the dynamic that praxis entails and to draw out relevant issues for analysis; the collaborative work with Sarah accomplished that task.

One part of the narrative inquiry included a conversational interview which, according to van Manen (1990), is part of gathering "experiential material":

The conversational interview method . . . [serves] as an occasion to reflect (*italics in text*) with the partner (interviewee) of the conversational relation on the topic at hand. . . [It] turns increasingly to a hermeneutic interview as the researcher can go back and again to the interviewee in order to dialogue with the interviewee about the ongoing record of the interview transcripts. The hermeneutic interview tends to turn the interviewees into participants or collaborators of the research project. (p. 63)

The aim of the researcher is to find a way to bring forth the issues that are important to the participants in a study and not the interests of the researcher alone. One way to accomplish this inclusion is to bring the participant into a relationship with the researcher in a way in which power, in this case the power

to interpret, is more evenly distributed between both the researcher and the participant. Such a power dynamic is essential to allow the participant full access to the expression of their concerns through conversation.

In order to allow for this dynamic van Manen recommends the use of the conversational interview. The function of such an interview is to “develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience” (p. 66). As such, the outcome of the conversational interview, that is Sarah’s narrative as well as my exploration of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project sets the scene in which the issues I intended to include in this study were explored.

Theoretical Foundations

The process of coming to choose the narrative inquiry method is grounded in two foundational elements of human science: “praxis” and “phenomenological research.” Researchers involved in human science recognize that human interaction is complex, dynamic and interactive. Max van Manen uses the term “human science” as the intention to acknowledge human life, which needs to know, reflect, and think, “to make itself knowable to itself, including its complex and ultimately mysterious nature” (p. 17). As such human science is neither simply a retelling of an experience nor appropriate where the desire is to isolate single variables for analysis. Rather, the emphasis in this

type of research is an acknowledgement of the complex and multi-faceted approaches used to identify and analyze the issues involved in the actual situation. There are no contrived experimental situations; instead real life interactions are explored. The use of the narrative description of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project and the collaborative narrative story provides an entry point for the interpretive analysis of the issues that are identified.

Both the process of coming to write the thesis and the thesis itself is in accord with the intersection of theory and practice characterized by Paulo Freire (2000) as praxis. Praxis – action intersecting with reflection – is a grounding philosophical element that has shaped this research. Where the Introduction and Chapter 1 express the researcher's experience and report of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project, the collaborative narrative in Chapter 2 shares with the reader additional evidence of further intersection with people involved in the original experience.

However, the narratives do not stand as a validation alone but as a witness to the dialogical educative process of the project, the collaborative discussions and writing with Sarah, and the reflections and analysis set out in this thesis. The intersection of action and reflection is not like one step that follows another in a separate fashion but rather to say that action and reflection occur simultaneously, which is interactional, dialogical, radical, and educational (Freire, 2000, p. 109). In Freire's praxis this interactive intersectionality continues on to further action and reflection until the needs of the people are

met, in this case, the need to explore how to live more ecologically sustainable lifestyles. In academic reflection, especially that which occurs about people's needs, without the inclusion or awareness of how action impacts reflection that reflection could be misguided and wrong. The need to include the people in the action that furthers their interests is supported by more and more researchers (Bradbury, 2001; Carr & Kemmis, 1997; Hall, 2001; Wildemeersch & Jansen, 1992).

In this respect, this research enriches in an ongoing dialogue within the community concerned about the need to further ecologically sustainable community education. In his discussion about the theory of praxis, Freire (2000) includes the educative role of action:

. . . the attempt of the teacher-student to understand a cognizable object is not exhausted in that object, because this act extends to other student-teachers in such a way that the cognizable object mediates their capacity for understanding. (p. 111)

In this context the quote means that to understand the Building Skills, Building Homes Project is not exhausted in the discussion about the project itself but rather in the extension of that act to understand, which is done with other teacher-student or researcher-participant dialogues as well as participating in the larger community's praxis. In this way the theory of action and reflection in praxis, Freire (2000) asserts that, "one cannot speak of an actor, nor simply of actors, but rather of actors in intercommunication" (p. 110).

Freire's model of praxis as educative is also complemented by Max van Manen's (1990) view of practice and theory as pedagogical within human science:

In contrast to the more positivistic and behavioural empirical sciences, human science does not see theory as something that stands before practice in order to "inform" it. Rather theory enlightens practice. Practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection. (p. 15)

For van Manen, reflection grounded in theory follows from and then in turn informs practice or action. So too, method can come out of the reflection on the learning that is embedded in experience. Method is the explanation of how answers to a thesis question came from a reflection about the way questions were posed of one's experience. Method, as such, emerges from the researcher's actions as well as reflections. As presented in a thesis, it informs the reader as to the rationale for the given approach to the researcher's pursuit of the question. The dialogical movement between theory and practice allows for the process of inherent issues to emerge; that is, "the issues of the actors, the people who belong to the case" (Stake, 1995p. 20). Thus, Sarah's narrative is placed prior to the discussion of method, as the method of narrative inquiry was chosen because it arose out of the process of reflection. This approach resulted in identifying issues and concerns expressed by both Sarah and myself.

Another foundational approach in this narrative inquiry is phenomenological research. Phenomenological research according to Max van Manen (1990) is "the study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to

describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness . . . phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld" (p. 11). However, it is not introspective in the sense of trying to describe something while in the midst of it; rather phenomenology is retrospective, that is where, "reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through" (p. 10).

This narrative inquiry is retrospective in the sense that the bulk of the research data and case description came from previous learning, yet the research is proactive, or anticipative (Michael Collins, 1995) in the sense that I want to "bring some action forward" to assess how the Building Skills, Building Homes Project is still being felt and acted upon. This approach is akin to Michael Collin's phenomenological orientation that "consistently points to the essential inter-connectedness of objects and events which occur in the everyday world of human action" (Michael Collins, 1995). This thesis is but one aspect of the complex interconnections that are the lived experience of those involved in community development.

The retrospective reflection allows the researcher to explore the questions about actions in the future: What will happen next? What do we need to know? What gets in the way of each of us getting to our goals? How have things changed? Each of these questions allows the researcher and the participant to draw on their experience and to look to the future and shape

goals and visions in a new way. Clandinin and Huber (2002) state that narrative inquiry speaks to such temporal issues in research:

The personal-social dimension points us inward and outward, inward "toward the internal conditions, such feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" . . . , and outward "toward the existential conditions" Moving backward and forward point us "to temporality – past, present, and future" Place "attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes". (p. 163)

Narrative inquiry allows for a movement back and forth through time as an appropriate tool to assist in the expression of the complex nature of the experience.

While I use narrative inquiry to bring forth the issues that arise out of the experience and interviews, I use the method of analysis to explore these issues. The narrative inquiry in this case presents the issues and at the same time leads us through the process of how we came to identify those issues with respect to our experience of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 provide an analysis of the issues emergent in Chapters 1 and 2. The methodological task operative in the last three chapters is like that of an explorer who stops to see where he or she has come from, how they got there, and where they are going (Michael Collins, 1995), "the way is open for others to extend the exploration or intensify the level of investigation at any juncture which relates to their particular concerns" (p. 258). This is true within the writing of the analysis and in the intentional experience of the reader. The desired intention for the reader is to bring the reality of the context of the experience to the foreground.

Finally, as the aim is to thoroughly understand the experience and thesis question, I have engaged in “progressive focusing” (Stake, 1995) throughout the activity of writing my thesis. This is an aspect of case study that allows for flexibility and permits the researcher to rework constantly the structural design as new or changing research questions and analysis become apparent (p. 9). One example of this approach for me is the realization that Sarah thought about community sustainability as rekindling the old ways of her people. This awareness of difference spurred me, in ensuing chapters, to research a better understanding of Indigenous peoples’ concepts of community, ecology, and learning. Marlene Brant Castellano (2000), co-director of research for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, concurs with the claim that we need to better comprehend Indigenous knowledge but warns:

Intergenerational transmission of ancient knowledge has been disrupted, and the damage has not been limited to the loss of what once was known: the process of knowledge creation – that is, the use of cultural resources to refine knowledge in the laboratory of daily living – has also been disrupted. (p. 25)

Nevertheless, it is imperative that non-Aboriginal people acknowledge and learn from those cultural values, norms, traditions that can be brought forward and blended into our existing cultural growth. This insight is confirmed by many Aboriginal writers including Cuthand (2005), Baptiste (2000), and Binda and Calliou (2001).

Leading from this chapter, Chapter 4 connects the issues revealed through the collaborative narrative inquiry, which deal with the value of an

ecologically sustainable lifestyle and how it links to each of three areas: housing, learning, and culture. Chapter 5 deals with the shifting notions of economic development and how a notion of community sustainability presents alternative ways of living, loving, and learning. Thus, Chapters 4 and 5 will incorporate theoretical support and provide an understanding of other writers who are concerned about the topic of learning to live more self-sustainably. The concluding chapter will include a look at the implications of an educational policy application of this research, the future of the community sustainability discourse, and its potential for social transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR: Community Sustainability: Striving for a Sense of Place

I know a place in the woods, and if you go there, you will stay.

Traditional Cuban Song: Nan Fon Bwaa
(Bunnett & Descendann, 2002)

Chapter 1 and 2 laid the groundwork for this case study through a description of the project and with a forward reflection by way of a narrative shared by Sarah Lewis. Chapter 3 provided the rationale for the narrative inquiry and the subsequent analysis constituent of the case study approach chosen for this thesis. This chapter is one of two chapters that details the analysis of selected issues advanced in Chapter 2. It aims to make the link between affordable housing, ecological lifestyles, and cultural perspectives through rethinking a sense of place as developed by such environmentally oriented educators as David Orr (1992), Edmund O'Sullivan (1999), William Vitek (1996) and Gregory Cajete (2001). A sense of place is a metaphor about where one lives and embedded in that "living" are deep values of identity, kinship, spirituality, esthetics, and responsibility. The connections that emerge indicate a profound basis of community sustainability, which the Building Skills, Building Homes Project exemplified.

This project allowed Sarah and I the opportunity to grapple with the problem of how we could sustain our own lives – part of which is a desire to build our own home. Not only was learning the skills necessary for building a home stimulating but, through this project, we encountered the empowering stabilizing force of learning and experiencing that we could sustain ourselves in our environment, especially through meeting such a basic need as shelter.

As well as achieving satisfaction through this learning experience, it stimulated, in Henry Giroux's (1992) thoughts regarding empowerment, that is, "the ability to think and act critically" (p. 11). This empowering experience motivated us to continue in our commitment to include alternative and natural building options as part of our quest to be the owner of our own house. We began to critically question what was getting in the way of accomplishing that goal.

There are obstacles to meeting our goals. Even though the experience of learning new skill sets was uplifting, there are ongoing barriers and limits to the continued learning of natural building techniques and the ability to apply that knowledge to our goals of sustainable living for ourselves and our communities. For example, Sarah has chosen to focus on carpentry as a career. In addition to the normal challenges of learning a trade she faces the concerns of positioning herself as a woman in the strata of predominantly male workers. The fact that the Building Skills, Building Homes Project employed an all woman crew initially helped her gain confidence in her ability to learn and practice

carpentry skills. Yet, in the actual workplace learning is limited and political, especially in non-traditional trades such as carpentry.¹⁸ Workplace learning and advancement is especially difficult for women in non-traditional trades where their skills are minimized and criticized. Due to these difficulties, such workplace restrictions stall the kind of skills learning Sarah desires and needs in order to begin another stage of meeting her goals, such as alternative construction methods. Nevertheless, Sarah has a vision of starting her own crew, or working on a family-based crew, to build natural and energy efficient homes in her own community.

For Sarah and my family, owning our home is important because it could fulfill a sense of control and grounding in a place. Edmund O'Sullivan (1999) argues for a more profound sense of place stating:

Our sense of belonging to a stable community and our security are lost in the shuffle of accelerated change and mobility. The result is the experience of a loss of connection to where we live, to people themselves and to the natural world that surrounds us. (p. 245)

¹⁸. Numerous studies have been conducted in this area: Court, G., & Moralee, J. (1995). *Balancing the Building Team: Gender Issues in the Building Professions*. (No. Report 284.): Sussex Univ., Brighton (England). Inst. for Employment Studies. BBB33290. Eisenberg, S. (1998). *We'll call you if we need you: experiences of women working*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press. Goldfrank, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Making ourselves at home: women builders and designers*. Grey, M. (1996). A history of women in the trades for integration with the gender equity in education and the workplace curriculum. Fairfield, MN: Vocational Curriculum Resource Center. Marshall, N. L. (1989). Women in the trades: final report of a survey of massachusetts tradeswomen (No. 195. Working Paper). Wellesley Coll., MA.: Center for Research on Women. BBB16630. Nontraditional Jobs for Women. A Resource Guide for Connecticut Women and Career Counselors. (1991). Shaw, L. (1998). Women in the Skilled Trades: Do They Perceive a Discriminatory Work (No. Reports--Research (143)). Women in Education for Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Employment. (1991). Oregon, U.S.

More than increasing our “economic standard of living”, we envisioned, at the beginning of the project, that home ownership would give us stability in a community of people and acknowledge that we are interconnected to them and their lives simply by being in proximity to them in a long-term way. The Core Neighbourhood Development Council, (an ad hoc planning committee working towards improvements to Saskatoon’s inner city neighbourhoods) worked on a process of producing visions and strategies some of which identified housing where the residents of Saskatoon would:

Advocate requirements that all new residential construction be designed to encourage pride of ownership and to facilitate communication among neighbours and links between households. (p. 4)

This is the general thrust of many of their strategies pertaining to housing: that home ownership be accountable and linked to community capacity building models (Dean et al., 2000; Packer et al., 2002; Vitek & Jackson, 1996).

Being in control of your home and land brings an ability to personally act on matters of importance as well as responsibilities (such as maintenance), rewards (such as personal aesthetics), and more deeply a sense of place that is cultural and spiritual; that is, profoundly meaningful. For us, the crucial concern in the autonomy that home ownership offers is an actualized attentiveness to our relationship to the land, our interconnectedness to it, and our actions regarding it. Embedded in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project was a growing awareness of just such interconnectedness to the environment and to each other. Improving the way we build our homes, both in the materials used

and in the energy saved, could create less of a negative impact on our environment (McKirdy, 1999). We learned that attention to the care of our environment, our culture, and ourselves is integrally bound up in how we progress as communities.

The next section will discuss how affordable housing programs have developed over the last 50 years but are still lacking in accessibility and vision. I propose that vision include more energy efficient options and choices, which should be accessible to all people. Another section will discuss how Indigenous people are grounded in a deep sense of place in their relationship to the land. Finally, two examples will describe the kind of change in thinking necessary to really incorporate ecological sensitivity into our lives and our communities. Introducing each section is an excerpt from Sarah's narrative.

Affordable Housing: Including Ecological Concerns

I want to build my own straw bale home for my family. I want to get a crew of builders together who are into natural or alternative construction. I want to learn about this kind of building so that my community, my people, can begin to learn about another way of life. (p. 16)

For Sarah and I, a major barrier to realizing our own home is that we cannot afford to buy either the land or the materials, even if we consider recycled materials. We live in subsidized or rental situations where we have little power to change or improve the energy efficiency of our living situations,

thus lowering our energy bills and freeing up meager cash flows for other areas of our family life.

Our personal situation is common for many families in Saskatoon¹⁹ and along with the shift away from sustainable energy research and development in the last two decades there is a similar downplaying of social responsibility regarding adequate and affordable housing for those who cannot buy their own homes. The Canadian Policy Research Network (Hulchanski, 2002) documented the history and current situation of the national policy regarding urban housing issues. In the last twenty years, there has been a significant decline in the amount of intervention from the federal government in housing issues noting, “there were very few homeless people and few, if any, homeless families in Canada before the mid-1980’s” (p. 2). Although there have been national initiatives, as well as municipal and community-based programs to deal with housing shortages, social responsibility to provide housing to all members of Canadian society has waned in the last 20 years (Hulchanski, 2002). Further to this reality is the following assumption:

If housing all Canadians adequately is a prerequisite for a sustainable social fabric, the toughest problem is how to house people with moderate and low incomes when the market mechanism is the main provider and allocator of housing, and where the price structure for residential land is driven by the ownership market (p. 16).

What is meant here is that after various levels of government have abandoned intervention in social housing schemas, the private real estate market is left to

deal with any housing shortages. Yet, this is contradictory for the private markets' only interests are in those people with enough money or credit to buy or build a house.

This has to change, and to some extent it is changing. There is a municipally led community plan (City of Saskatoon, 2003) in Saskatoon that comprises many sectors of housing, including all levels of government, existing housing organizations, social research representatives, construction industry, as well as poverty-oriented representation, for example Quint Development Corporation. This community-based organization, in partnership with credit unions, the Saskatchewan Provincial Government, and the Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation have successfully helped many families in the core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon purchase homes who otherwise would not have been able to do so. As of fall 2004 over 100 families have purchased homes through housing co-operatives and 20 of these families have taken over the title and mortgage of their own homes (Quint Development Corporation, 2004). The broad range of participants in these discussions is indicative of the realization that each sector, that is, the private, the governmental, the community, nor the individual, can make changes on their own.

In addition, many affordable housing policy proponents do not see the cost benefit of building the best energy-efficient houses that make socially-provided housing more affordable to the individual (in lower energy costs), but

¹⁹ . In 2001, the average household income in Briarwood (an new suburb) was \$133,468 while the average household income in Pleasant Hill (an inner city

also promote a more equitable relationship with the environment. The City of Saskatoon recently published a "Saskatoon Community Plan for Homelessness and Housing" (2003) stating, only once in the whole document, the need to recognize "success, achievement, innovation, and good practices in serving the homeless and those in need of housing" (p. 19).²⁰ This report came about as a response to an announcement of federal money committed to the social housing issue in January 2001 (Hulchanski, 2002). Civic, provincial, and community-based representatives came together to produce a community plan:

The Saskatoon Community Plan for Homelessness and Housing has been developed to guide the strategic efforts of stakeholders in Saskatoon. The following are the reasons a planning process was undertaken:

- To create a range of affordable and supportive housing options
- To co-ordinate and collaborate efforts focused on the root causes of homelessness
- To find long-term solutions through sustainable initiatives
- To increase the awareness of the importance of housing
- To ensure adequate and affordable housing is recognized as a fundamental human right (p. 14)

However, beyond the above statement there is no mention of how or what successful, innovative, and good practices are for the homeless and affordable housing. This thesis is attempting to speak to the potential of renewable energy sources as one measure of success, as well as projects that are community-based and where the community sees the benefits from its own economic development. This is what the poems speak to at the beginning of

neighbourhood) was \$22, 603 (Quint Essentials Newsletter, Winter 2004, p. 11).²⁰ See:

http://www.city.saskatoon.sk.ca/org/city_planning/affordable_housing/index.asp. To date the City of Saskatoon will not allow any permanent straw bale structures to be built.

this thesis; it is imperative that our development comes from our own choosing and doing along with the support of various levels from government and industry.

Although policy states a willingness to provide appropriate housing, the idea of what is “appropriate” needs to be stretched to include innovative and creative ideas such as natural designs and construction, which promote an awareness of our relationship to the land (Orr, 2002; Smith & Williams, 1999; Vitek & Jackson, 1996). Transformative in its potential to contribute to meeting housing needs, especially for the poor, the use of natural building methods offers a long-term commitment to honouring the lives of people and place. David Orr (2002) explicitly states that, “designing with nature . . . disciplines human intentions with the growing knowledge of how the world works as a physical system. The goal is not total mastery but harmony that causes no ugliness, human or ecological, somewhere else or at some later time” (p. 4).

Ecologically Sustainable Lifestyles: Matters of Choice

I do want to live more gently on the land and not use so many of its resources wastefully. (p. 21)

Ecologically sustainable living has not been given due recognition. The term and concept applies to those people who choose a certain way of living that comes from a keen awareness and sensitivity to humanity’s impact on the

land and all things living and non-living. For those people not involved with such lifestyle choices there is a perception that the alternatives offered by ecologically oriented builders are somehow inferior, impossible, or unnecessary compared to mainstream living options. Joseph F. Kennedy writes, “those who recognize the environmental, social, and economic costs of our current ways of

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construction believe that natural building provides part of the solution to the complex worldwide problem of sustainable living” (Kennedy et al., 2002, p. 94).

Such differences in viewpoints are due largely to a lack of understanding of what ecologically sustainable lifestyles include, as well as an honest listing by alternative design advocates of the pros and the cons of building naturally.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that such lifestyles, more often than not, are careful and conscientious choices based on strong moral beliefs and principles of relationship to the land. Choices of habitation, food, and material consumption, as well as energy usage, are essential components to an individual, family, or community intent on setting the environment as a priority.

One of the places Sarah mentions and where we went on a tour is the Craik Sustainable Living Project.²¹ The town of Craik, Saskatchewan, in partnership with other ecologically oriented groups, is the most concrete example of a local group of people who are acting on their choice to live a more ecologically sustainable lifestyle.

Although organized around the larger framework of learning about ecologically sustainable lifestyles, the focal point of the Building Skills, Building

²¹. See their website at: <http://www.craikecovillage.ca>.

Homes Project was the building of two straw bale structures. The reasons these two structures were chosen rests with each partner's goals and the owner's resources. The Prairie Institute for Human Ecology and the landowner of Kissimmee Lake have plans to use the vault cabin, constructed near Shell Lake, Saskatchewan, as part of an eco-educational venture. The second structure, a composting toilet facility, will be used by students and staff of the Brightwater Science and Environment Program (Saskatoon Public School Division) as a restroom and as a teaching tool for alternative building structures and demonstrating alternative human waste management technology. Both structures will maintain a community education component, used by individuals and groups in educational settings. Many aspects of learning about ecologically sustainable lifestyles for the project were centred on the construction of these straw bale structures.

What makes a natural homebuilder different is the extreme attention given to energy efficiency, which often forsakes some or all conventional forms and designs.²² However, there are several examples of energy-efficient homes, businesses, and industries that are within the realm of what most people would

²². See the following web sites for examples:
http://www.greenbuilder.com/sbat/2001_Home_Tour/,
<http://www.archibio.qc.ca/pages/bale.html>, and
<http://www.alternatives.com/cob-building/whatiscob.html>.

accept as normal.²³ There are three major principles a natural builder or designer takes into account: energy, practicality of space, and a rootedness in place. All three of these aspects were dealt with in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project through direct instruction, field trips, and informal discussions.

Energy

The builders involved with the project learned more than just construction skills. They learned why these skills were important to the design and why the design was chosen. One of the main reasons a particular plan was chosen and attention given to where it was placed on the land was how that building was going to access, store, and release energy: heat, light, and body energy.

What we became aware of was that although there are energy-efficient technologies, there is not the will in society to change the way we harness or use energy. That is, although there is a growing interest and activity in all sectors of society, including individuals, governments, and to a lesser extent, industry changes are still very small scale and selective. This sentiment is seen

²³. For local examples of other cities and rural areas see these selected sites: Saskatchewan: <http://www.rkc.ca/~studiotrail/brochure2004.pdf>, <http://www.sboa.sk.ca/remarks.htm>, Regina: <http://www.harvesthomes.ca/applications.htm>, Calgary: Alberta Sustainable House Society (web site not operating), Edmonton: <http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/8264/main.html>, Alberta: <http://www.greatexpressions.ab.ca/heartwood/index.htm>. And the University of Manitoba: <http://www.csae-scgr.ca/Perspectives/Winter04/Winter04Newsletter.pdf>. For general listing of resources see the bibliography compiled by Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation: <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/>.

in such documents as The Canadian Renewable Energy Guide (McKirdy, 1999) where “the recognition of environmental damage and pollution from primary and secondary industries will set the stage for unprecedented use of renewable energy, in combination with energy efficiency – displacing fossil fuels and nuclear energy over time” (p. xi). Further evidence of the reluctance for using renewable energy is the push, since the “energy crisis” of the 1970s, to have more, not less, expansion of the fossil fuel and nuclear industry, thus minimizing further the development and potential of renewable energy technology (p. xi). It is interesting to note that when presenting the project to others, the aspect of energy efficiency is always most engaging and catches people’s attention. Therefore, a discussion of straw bale as the insulation of choice is significant at this point.

Straw bale is one of many alternative building options that attend to the core issue of energy savings and contributing to environmental benefits. Simply put, it is another form of insulation. Straw bale walls have an insulation rating of between 43-70 R-value compared to, for example, a wood-frame wall with batting in-fill at 10-15 R-value (Kennedy et al., 2002, p. 64) – a very notable difference. In numerous designs, bales also have structural significance. One of the buildings in the project demonstrates a design called “load bearing”. This means the “bales act as both the structural load-bearing component and as insulation simultaneously” (McKirdy, 1999, p. 11). The upside of this technique is that less wood needs to be used (See Figure 1).

One of the oldest surviving North American straw bale structures, a church built in Nebraska in the late nineteenth century, is a load-bearing structure. The fact that this church, still in fine condition, is over 100 years old is a testament to straw bale's longevity. Yet, such durability requires due care and, just as conventional housing is subject to fire, pests, and maintenance, so too alternative homebuilders must pay attention to the same hazards and concerns.²⁴ Obtaining knowledge of the particulars of these concerns is very necessary and specific but is neither a pro nor a con; all buildings, no matter how they are built have to be safe and maintained. A perceived negative might be that, because natural building methods are a niche industry, they are often labour intensive. This may be true but most often though they are a labour of love for the owners and their crews of friends and relatives.²⁵

A straw bale design was chosen for the Building Skills, Building Homes Project because the bales are more readily available, require little or no preparation, and are relatively faster to construct than some other alternative methods (such as stackwall/cordwood, rammed earth, or adobe). The trick about getting straw bales (not hay bales) is that in drought years (like the Canadian prairies have seen recently), straw bales are in shorter supply and can cost a little more. It is also necessary to know a farmer who still bales straw in the "old fashioned way", that is, in small rectangular-shaped batts, rather than

²⁴. See: <http://www.thelaststraw.org/>, and <http://www.dsaarch.com/>.

²⁵. For example recent articles highlight this collaborative strategy: (Brooker, 2003; Cruickshank, 2002; Mitchell, 2002; n.a., 2002).

large, round bales. There are also advances being made with straw and other natural materials as insulation with such products as strawboard.²⁶

Nevertheless, the cost of ordinary straw bales is still lower than regular insulation. So, another factor to consider is the total cost of a building, which can range for straw bale homes from as low as \$10 to as high as \$200 plus per square foot (Lacinski & Bergeron, 2000. p. 56). Straw bale homes have the perception of being less expensive – which they can be. But in our western society there is a tendency to get complex and costly, “buildings are complicated enough that no one material choice can have all that great effect on their total cost” (Lacinski & Bergeron, 2000. p. 20). One of the teacher-builders on the project put it another way, “most of the cost of any building is in the foundation and the roof” (Mainland, 2003). Even though there is still much to be learned about straw bale construction’s contribution to overall ecological sustainable living it is still rated as one of the best energy-saving technologies of choice for alternative home construction in the northern climates (Lacinski & Bergeron, 2000, p. 52).

Space

The next aspect of ecological concern is space – how much of the land will we use, and with what will our homes be filled? The Art of Natural Building

²⁶. There are also other types of straw insulation such as strawboard, which is mechanically compressed straw. See for examples: <http://www.agriboard.com/>, <http://www.goldboard.com>, and <http://www.quantexdesign.com>.

(Kennedy et al., 2002) talks about space and the practicality of utilizing only what room and materials we need. The idea of efficiency of space is central to many, though not all, alternative builders.²⁷ The generally smaller size of most energy conscious homes is contrary to the conventional North American ideal of larger houses for fewer people. These kinds of homes require more natural resources and more energy to heat and light, not less, per person:

The WorldWatch Institute estimates that if the rest of the world used natural resources at the rate we do in America, it would take two additional Earths to meet the global demand. Overall, the 1.1 billion wealthiest people in the world consume 64 percent of the resources while the 1.1 billion poorest consume only 2 percent. (Kennedy et al., 2002, p. 154)

As well, Ghandi said, "Mother Earth has enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed" (Bhasin, 1992, p. 30). There are not enough natural or raw resources on this earth, in the way they are currently being used, to give everyone in the world the same standard of living that is, in particular, enjoyed in North America. Kamla Bhasin goes on further to relate this story:

Once a journalist asked Mahatma Gandhi whether he wanted India to have the same standard of living which Britain had. Gandhi replied, "To have its standard of living, a tiny country like Britain had to exploit half the globe. How many globes will a large country like India need to exploit to have a similar standard of living?" (Bhasin, p. 30)

²⁷. See for example Harrowsmith (No. 175, April 2004). They promote luxury sustainable living, that is, a 5,000 square foot home for two people. This is not sustainable living; it is just luxury.

Like this journalist, I really wanted to believe that everyone on this planet could want and have the same standard of living as we do in North America. Now, due to the impact we are having on the environment, resources, and space, I doubt the validity of claiming all the space and materials I desire. How we use our space (that is, our environment) and its resources to sustain our lives also has an effect on our relationship, or lack of relationship, to place.

Place

There is more in the nature of a place than meets the eye. There is, embedded in the forms our shelters take, a story, but too often in our modernistic industrially driven buildings there is a lack of attention to historicity, as David Orr (2002) relates in his book *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention*. For example, he critiques campus building architecture as giving the message that it does not matter where we are being taught:

The design of buildings and landscape is thought to have little or nothing to do with the process of learning or the quality of scholarship that occurs in a particular place. But in fact, buildings and landscapes reflect a hidden curriculum that powerfully influences the learning process. (p. 127-8)

Orr further describes the negative learning that occurs in buildings which teach us nothing of our locality, of how that place connects to our identity, or of how we give and take from our environment (energy usage). Most modern architecture is based on squares and lines, intending to be “functional, [production] efficient, minimally offensive, and little more” (p. 128). Such

designs, he proposes, basically teach us to be numb to our surroundings or to the effect our lifestyle has on the environs; that, in essence, “disconnectedness is normal” (p. 128).

On the contrary, the structures built by the people involved in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project will relate a story, in pictures, in words, and in the telling: an understanding of humanity in relationship to self and the land. The purpose of story embedded in the building design is not only to entertain the sensibilities but also to teach, to continue the learning and the creating by drawing attention to the importance of that particular building in that particular place. For the builder and the users of such buildings, that is, the community, there is a strong sense of identity and belonging. William Vitek (1996), in the book *Rooted in the land: Essays on community and place*, also makes this argument:

. . . [The contributors] speak directly to the challenges of rediscovering community in an industrial age. All of them believe that social communities placed in a landscape are both necessary and possible, despite the challenges and drawbacks, seen and unseen. (p. 6)

Another aspect of place is the use of resources at hand. Using local materials is very important to natural builders. As much as possible, they often utilize recycled materials, which require time and energy to gather and store. A person needs a unique ability to discern what recycled materials are useful and how to use them in a particular building project. This was a skill that one of the teacher/builders possessed and shared with the participant builders at the Kissimmee Lake site; the vault cabin was built almost completely with recycled

materials. However, as valuable a resource as recycling may be, it becomes a limitation when you do not have land or need to support jobs and lives that do not allow for the space, time, and energy recycling requires.

Fortunately, there are initiatives by the government to encourage homeowners to become energy efficient.²⁸ Unfortunately, these incentives are only for those who can afford them. For the majority of people who cannot afford such options, and especially for those who rent, the power to influence society's direction to more energy efficient homes is limited by the current capitalist system of supply and demand. Perhaps there is an need to question the claim that people buy, for example, sub-standard houses, processed food, or fossil fuel energy because they want to is valid; it is more likely because they have few other choices, especially ones they can afford.

Another major difference for many, although not all, energy efficient options is that they are very local solutions, where individuals and communities build or retrofit designs, using such choices as solar heating, photovoltaic power (electric power from sunlight), wind, microhydro, and biomass technology.²⁹

²⁸. See: <http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/english/index.cfm?Text=N&PrintView=N>.

²⁹. Not all energy efficiency options are local and communal, for example, wind farms. Although touted as ecological, they are very dangerous to the environment. Winona LaDuke (2002) tells the story of the Cascade Klickitat, *The wind that blows over our ancestors: nature's power, Enron and Native lands*, where they have fought energy broker Enron's wind farm on their ceremonial mountain. Again, the issue is not wind energy, but the disrespectful way outsiders are imposing their shortsighted desires of oversized projects (p. 12-17).

For example, Winona Laduke (2002) writes in an article called Debbie Tewa: Building a Future with Her Community about a village that chose not to have power lines installed. The decision was ecological, aesthetic, and cultural, but it was also political; it was about self-sustainability. Utility companies would gain right of way onto the land and could take the land if the band members were unable to pay their bills. Without power lines, and with the solar-powered system that Debbie Tewa maintains, they keep their lands and their autonomy intact (p. 218).

Indigenous Perspectives: Rekindling the Old Ways

For me, the old ways are the guiding principles and values that shaped our unique way of connecting to the world around us, our territory . . . We learned from the environment – the animals, the plants, and the weather – how to live with the land that was our home. (p. 21)

Throughout the previous sections an attempt was made to convey a sense of the importance of why ecologically sustainable ways of living should be included in community development issues such as affordable housing and how this is connected to our sense of place. In this section, cultural perspectives on ecological living are discussed. Gregroy Cajete (2001) claims that some environmentalists have a hard time understanding and maintaining a really good perspective on how other cultures view their relationship to the land. Such

perspectives are fundamentally a part of traditional Indigenous teachings historically and worldwide, (Apffel-Marglin & Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas, 1998a; Cajete, 2001; Grim, 2001; Kawagley, 1995; LaDuke, 1999; Vasquez, 1998), although ecological activists vary in their inclusion and understanding of First Nations' realities.

Because of this gap, it is vital to understand that, as Winona LaDuke (1999) expresses from her people's teaching, "our commitment and tenacity [to the environment] spring from our deep connection to the land. This relationship to land and water is continuously reaffirmed through prayer, deed, and our way of being – minobimaatiaiwin, the "good life" (p. 4).

In my life, I have questioned my relationship to this land I was born into. In my mid-twenties, I attended a family reunion. My heritage is German-Russian and Roman Catholic. The priest, a cousin, spoke in his homily about the Old Testament Abraham and compared his life to how our family had prospered (gained lands and resources), increased our progeny (from the time my great-grandfather arrived in 1905 to 1985 there were more than 900 descendants), and produced much bounty (I have been raised to believe that production is a key value of being German/Russian). I asked myself, "from whom did we prosper?" I was vaguely aware that these were not our lands initially and I began to question if we were prospering at the expense of others, namely the First Nation's people of this country. I felt then the stirrings of a critical awareness that the pioneer's impact has been not just a take-over of

land but an even more devastating destruction of culture. In this section, I do not want to give an expose of that defeat but to explore the beginnings of what non-Aboriginal people need to learn and what needs to be unlearned.³⁰ The issue is not so much about any one ethnic group but about the living culture, locale, and spirit. This commitment seems vital to Indigenous peoples. Euro-Canadians, who hold the balance of power in this country, must be more open to learning from those people whose lands we share. The idea that we are in a trust relationship, especially with regards to the land and its resources, with Aboriginal people is not popular. Euro-Canadians do not, in general, understand that Indigenous peoples interpret everything from land ownership to language-driven concepts, such as the term culture, from a different perspective to that of Non-native Canadians.

The Building Skills, Building Homes Project encouraged participants to seek knowledge of identity and place through ceremonies and teachings. Sarah spoke about her desire to rekindle the old ways of her people. This was an unexpected part of our interview. I was surprised that she would think about what we were doing as “learning the old ways” rather than as “community sustainability” and other language similar to what I was using.

It is crucial to understand the difference in how we use words and word concepts. For example, in an analysis of words like “culture” and “nature,” Jack

³⁰. Exposure of the cultural genocide and the swelling movements to decolonize Indigenous thought, structures, and actions are well documented and growing. (See for example: Cardinal, 1999; Churchhill, 1998; Duran & Duran, 1995; Stannard, 1992; See for example: Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; York, 1990).

Forbes (2001) notes that the Lenape (and similarly other peoples of North America) have a different meaning for the word "culture." They use "culture" more as a verb, "doing, acting, behaving, or living in a certain way . . . 'together-doing'" (Forbesp.118-9). Conversely, in non-Aboriginal contexts, "culture" is used more in its noun forms, to name statically something in a category of place or time, "providing the illusion that there may be something out there in the real world which corresponds with the word" (p. 116). He states that although "culture" is used as an abstract noun, it cannot be "inherently fixed, static, and separate, while the reality is that what we, as humans, do is always changing (however slowly) and is never separated from other humans or the environment by absolute boundaries" (p. 116). Basically, everything non-Aboriginal people do, think, and speak is done differently from Indigenous peoples' perspectives of reality. It is essential to learn that this difference is valid and necessary, moreover with openness of heart and mind the shift in thinking is not difficult to grasp.

In terms of a sense of place, Indigenous peoples have succeeded in managing and preserving the land in relatively pristine naturalness, thus making environmentalism a non-issue for thousands of years over vast spaces (Grim, 2001; Kawagley, 1995). Whereas non-Aboriginal people have sought to control the land and mold it to their idea of what it should be and do, Indigenous peoples have done the opposite:

The traditional relationship and participation of Indian people with the American landscape includes not only the land itself but the very way in

which they have perceived themselves and reality. Indian people through generations of living in America have formed, and have been formed by, the land. . . . The land is an extension of Indian thought and being. As one Pueblo elder states, "it is this place that holds our memories and the bones of our people. . . this is the place that made us!" (Cajete, 2001, p. 623)

The key difference here is that Indigenous peoples have been formed and informed by their environment. Each culture has created its own unique blend of traditions and ceremonies, language and story, that has allowed Mother Earth to teach the people how to live with her. They do not hold this knowledge captive or the property of a select chosen few. Many First Nation's people realize that their existence and the restoration of traditional values are "fundamentally about the collective survival of all human beings" (LaDuke, 1999).

Yet, as Sarah indicated, what she describes as "going back to the old ways" is not that easy or direct; nor is it really about going back, but about bringing forward the values, the discourse with the land, and the communality. The values for Indigenous people are embedded in teachings, traditions, language, and action (Forbes, 2001). The discourse with the land is a relationship born of patient listening, observation, and acceptance of limitations. Failure to accept our limits is something which Wolfgang Sachs (1999) criticizes globalists and environmentalists alike (p. 153). We just do not know when to stop or hold back on progress, be that technological, social, economic, or political. Such thinking is deeply rooted even in the most socially progressive

thinkers of our time. Following are two examples of the kind of change in thinking necessary to effect community sustainability.

Learning and Unlearning: Two Examples

I know I would not feel as strongly about self-sustainable living if I had not had the experience of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. It gave me the opportunity to really learn, not just in my head, but with my hands, what this sustainable living is all about. (p. 18)

Re-thinking human waste

The following is an example of how many people in the “developed” nations must continue the process of unlearning old messages of what is normal and acceptable in building, living, and structuring community. Madhu Suri Prakash and Hedy Richardson (1999) convey, in an article entitled Turning human waste into gifts of soil?, how a Latin American community, unable to access modern sewage infrastructures, has opted for its own alternative waste management system that is turning human waste into reusable compost. They succinctly present the waste management problem:

Being as opaque as all other modern technologies, modern sewage systems fail to reveal to their users that by promoting convenience today, they are inconveniencing those yet to be born; that by absorbing vast proportions of the water piped into private homes and public institutions, involving an inordinately high consumption of energy, they are creating scarcities of drinking or irrigation water for those that constitute the Two-Thirds World (“social majorities”). (p. 67)

After reading the article, one has the sense that there is something more than just using a lot of water in the flush toilet that needs to be reconsidered. There is a connection to a larger picture of the myth of convenience that is governed by modern norms of behaviour in matters considered private, obscure, and disconnected, as well as controlled by a complex array of bureaucracy and official regulations. To demonstrate the level of such a reality in our country, imagine for a moment trying to install a composting toilet in our house or business. Even if one were personally sold on the idea, the actuality would be nearly impossible. Nevertheless, it is cabin owners who are becoming more interested in composting toilets, those people who once again are able to afford such a "luxury."

The project, in Xico-Chalco, Mexico, described in this article mirrors the kind of learning experience we were attempting with the Loo with a View – the second building constructed in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project. Similar to the project in Mexico, ours was communal, involved integrated hands-on learning, and implemented a uniquely localized solution. The Loo will house two different kinds of composting toilets, as well as a third for liquid waste. In sharing this technology with students, teachers, and visitors to the site, participants and leaders of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project had to breakdown some of the common misconceptions of human waste management that we basically take for granted. Similarly, the project in Xico-Chalco involved a community-based, ecological literacy project around the installation of dry

latrines (very similar to composting toilets), with comparable learning components.

Prakash and Richardson (1999) describe four principles, which need to be unlearned. This kind of learning and unlearning can be applied to how we build structures and utilize all forms of energy: by shifting our thinking, attitudes, and perceptions. First, there is the false perception of less than, that somehow a technology that participates in ecological restoration (like dry latrines, straw bale homes, and solar power) is not as good as technology that wastes and bleeds the earth. Second, there is a need to “liberate [ourselves] from the blind faith” (p. 69) that technologies of the developed nations are superior or more desirable. Third, it is now known that even if such developed technologies from the North are offered, the catastrophic nature of these ideas and realities for the “developing” community are based on “a whole set of ecological, economic, political, health, moral, and educational reasons” (p. 69) that do not necessarily favor the community in need. Finally, for good and enduring solutions to occur strong leadership and empowering knowledge must be nurtured in the community in order to sustain a radically different lifestyle choice. It is this unlearning that so many writers of ecologically alternative ways of living are trying to communicate through their words, their actions, and in truth, their prayers. It is this shift in awareness that the Building Skills, Building Homes Project was trying to impart to its students, whether they were

participants, leaders, visitors, or others, either directly through instruction and discussion, or through the action of doing something different.

Re-thinking Praxis

Paulo Freire is a progressive thinker, educator, and activist of our times. His development of the concept of praxis can be viewed as the basis for an understanding of the dynamic of action and reflection that intersect and inform each other. Here we are concerned with the interaction of our relationships in the quest for alternative lifestyle practices. However, throughout this thesis much attention is given to the environment and the spirit of the land, its animals, trees, rocks, and birds; they have been part of this discourse, within the action and reflection. Many Indigenous people and some environmentalists seek to include the sentientness, the inherent wisdom, of Mother Earth in our conversing and knowledge sharing. This inclusion, however, is actually in stark contrast to the foundational starting point of “praxis” for Freire. Influenced by a Catholic and European scientific dualistic mindset, Freire (2000) states:

Humankind, as beings of the praxis, differ from animals, which are beings of pure activity. Animals do not consider the world; they are immersed in it. In contrast, human beings emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing can understand it and transform it with their labor. (p. 106)

For Indigenous peoples however, the world is not understood by objectifying it; we come to understand the world by submersing ourselves wholly, humbly, completely, and sacrificially into a stance of learning from the world and are

thus transformed by it. Animals are “pure” (p. 106), but in the Indigenous teachings it is we who must choose to learn from them. Yupiaq researcher, Angayuqaq Kawagley (1995) states:

Alaska Native peoples have traditionally tried to live in harmony with the world around them. This has required the construction of an intricate subsistence-based worldview, a complex way of life with specific cultural mandates regarding the ways in which the human being is to relate to other human relatives and the natural and spiritual worlds. . . . [For example] attitude was thought to be as important as action; therefore one was to be careful in thought and action so as not to injure another’s mind or offend the spirits of the animals and surrounding environment. For one to have a powerful mind was to be “aware of or awake to its surroundings”. (p. 8)

Implicitly, Freire would agree with the need for an appropriate attitude. And he might agree that with diverse experiences comes different awareness that affect our thinking. However, due to his religious and philosophical background and experience, he might be reluctant, to acknowledge that we learn directly from things non-human. William R. Wilson (1997) concurs with the need to readjust our thinking and acting in this regard:

Deep ecologists argue that anthropocentrism is an epistemological error, shared by many large philosophical traditions, which leads to individuals perceiving and evaluating their actions in Creation as if only humans are of value. . . . [It] is an epistemological error, deep ecologists claim, because it is a belief which denies the fundamental truth that all parts of Creation are inter-connected and inter-dependent. (p. 5)

George Cajete (2001), a Pueblo Indian educator, completes this adjustment of attitude to the land by saying, “the Americas are an ensouled geography and the relationship of Indian people to this geography embodies a sacred orientation to place that reflects the very essence of what may be called

spiritual ecology" (p. 623). He encourages more place-oriented learning approaches in a real and tangible understanding of what it means to be human in relationship with nature, self, and others.

How does this affect the identity of community educators? It might be better to ask, who are the community learners and who are leading projects of learning? They are the people involved in directing, managing, and promoting community development, issue-driven organizations. In this case, and consistent with Freire's pedagogy, the Building Skills, Building Homes Project was an example of community sustainability, where diverse community groups and individuals learning together about how to become attentive to our relationship with the land and with each other.

CHAPTER FIVE: Community Sustainability: The Global Influences of Economic Development

The task is immense. We must do no less than learn to reinhabit the Earth (Berry, 1985). This means learning to live as conscious, participating members of the larger Earth community. The Earth is like a single cell in the universe, and we are not over the cell, but part of her life. We will live or die as this single cell lives or dies.

(Mische, 1992, p. 9)

This chapter takes the discussion of the analysis of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project on the local level in Chapter 4 and shows how the issues it attempted to address are intricately linked to international or global issues of development. This chapter traces the concept of “development” and how that notion has shifted with new terminology, while still adhering to basic inadequacies and fallacies. Such failings are in the concept itself and are still being promoted by state and industry. Writers such as Sachs (1999), Apffel-Marglin (1998b), Prakash (1998), Orr (2002), Saunders (2002), and Wharf & Clague (1997) demystify the notions of development from the standpoint of their own lifeworlds. Together they show how many aspects of the human and non-human worlds have been adversely affected.

This chapter demonstrates different government views on the notion of development, as well as international and Indigenous perspectives. In addition, this chapter discusses community in relation to development and how this change has impacted development policies. Further, it addresses education, with a look at community education concepts and practices. Lastly this chapter investigates sustainable development with a focus on how “development” proponents are currently dealing with environmental issues. More players are becoming involved in the development schema, but to what extent has their engagement altered the basic assumptions put in place just over fifty years ago?

Finally, this survey explores the notion of “community sustainability”. This is a linking concept that offers a rationale and a context for people to be involved in their own self-enduring efforts to balance our relations with our environment and with each other.

Formative Notions of Development

United States

For Wolfgang Sachs (1999) “development”, as a specific concept and practice, has shaped relationships between states of the Northern Hemisphere and communities of people around the world for a mere sixty years. He asserts that the practice of development went on for some time in the form of

colonialism. However, colonialism was principally concerned with cultural domination; its primary mission was to “civilize” the people and, secondly, to make profits from economic trade. Not in conflict with colonialism, the concept of development shifted the direction of colonialism to an economic race, first and foremost, and then a concern for the social welfare of people. Sachs (1999) describes how President Harry Truman, in his inauguration speech before Congress, January 1949, defined the largest part of the world, the “south” as “underdeveloped areas”:

There it was, suddenly a permanent feature of the landscape, a pivotal concept that crammed the immeasurable diversity of the globe’s south into a single category: underdeveloped. For the first time, the new world view was announced: all the peoples of the earth were to move along the same track and aspire to only one goal – development. And the road to follow lay clear before the presidents eyes: “Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace.” . . . Development meant nothing less than projecting the American model of society onto the rest of the world. (p. 5)

The term “development” itself most often refers to approaches and practices that have to do with economic prosperity defined predominantly by the United States. Because of the collapse of colonial powers in World War II, the United States emerged as the strongest economic nation. It continued to develop its dominance primarily through economic strategies. Consider, for example, the Cold War, economic sanctions, and the eventual demise of the other dominant post-WWII nation, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Many writers (Christenson & Robinson, 1980; Sachs, 1997, 1999; Saunders, 2002) note how “development” came into greater use after World War II.

Development was applied to those countries (predominantly in South Africa, Latin America, South America, and large parts of Asia) initially freed from their colonial masters, who were then expected to embrace all aspects of Western life, including political structures, economic systems, and social institutions (Sachs, 1999). Yet, owing to the emphasis of development on economic advancement, often at the expense of the social well-being of people, the terms “development” and “economic development” are used interchangeably. In fact, it is probably better to use economic development to introduce the topic of development in the sense of progress and change, so as not to be confused with other uses - for example, when speaking of “psychological development”.

Agencies, institutions, and departments, such as the World Bank Group³¹, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Federal international development departments (such as the Canadian International Development Agency, CIDA) were quickly established with a fast track approach to building and promoting economic development, for the vast majority of people, in selected “underdeveloped” countries. In commenting on this situation Sachs (1999) had this to say:

“Development”, during the decades after the Second World War, was nothing other than a reincarnation of the late eighteenth-century idea of material progress, only now projected world-wide and considered attainable within a few decades through planning and engineering. Like

³¹. The World Bank, established in 1945, has grown to include the following agencies: The International Development Association (est. 1960), The International Finance Corporation (est. 1956), The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (est. 1988), and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (est. 1966).

progress, development is open-ended: it knows no point of arrival. (p. 165)

Even without knowing the point or points of arrival, proponents of economic development are more concerned with having everyone, internationally as well as domestically, catching up – but to whose standard and at what expense? Throughout the era of colonialism European countries and then the United States were dominant players. Sachs (1999) further concludes that the shift to economic development has been completely initiated and highly controlled by American policy and enterprise.

A book sponsored by the World Bank, Washington, DC (Soubbotina & Sheram, 2000) confirms that development is still, 50 years later, measured in terms of economic growth indicators and that it is now incorporating human and environmental capital as well. Economic growth is the increase of a nation's monetary wealth, yet they admit that, "[this] growth was achieved at the cost of greater inequity, higher unemployment, weakened democracy, loss of cultural identity, or over consumption of resources needed by future generations" (p. 16). There has been a clear admission of "developments' " shortcomings by the powerful financial institutions designed to ensure its promotion. Nevertheless, their solution to ameliorate the human condition is with "more improvement in workers' knowledge and skills along with opportunities for their efficient use: more and better jobs, better conditions for new businesses to grow, and greater democracy at all levels of decision making" (p. 16). It would seem that the last point about democracy might in

fact be troublesome for them, if true democracy were in practice. Nevertheless, this kind of response gives the impression that if humanity could just work more efficiently, produce more, buy and sell more, coupled with building more, than somehow that will solve all our social problems too. The human development that this book advocates is “measured by life expectancy, adult literacy, access to all three levels of education, as well as people’s average income which is a necessary condition of their freedom of choice” (p. 16). However new this shift may seem, it is still very close to the terms set in 1973 by Robert McNamara of the World Bank, who states,

We should strive to eradicate absolute poverty by the end of the century. That means, in practice, the elimination of malnutrition and illiteracy, the reduction of infant mortality and the raising of life expectancy standards to those of developed nations. (Sachs, 1999, p. 9).

The rhetoric aside, his statement demonstrates the power of this institution to define and set the pace for development on a global scale.

Also, the point can be made that, for example, everyone wants to, and therefore needs to, read and write in English in order to be considered literate, in addition to learning in a comparable institution such as the schooling systems of the “developed” North. This is not the case, that is, not every society wants or needs to be able to know English in order to sustain themselves or to be considered “developed”. Sachs (1999) describes how the view of development today, as in its inception, still assumes that every society in the world wants to be American and has to catch up quickly. The fallacy of this assumption remains to be fully revealed as the powerful elite prevails in their commitment

to the development agenda. Such falsehoods will be addressed further from international and Indigenous perspectives.

Development has affected domestic policy in the United States as much as international policy. State and financial institutions have been concerned with economic advancement in all sectors of its society. Christenson & Robinson (1980), in their book *Community Development in America*, have described economic development as being chiefly concerned with “increasing productivity and efficiency, in spreading forms of economic organizations that multiply and distribute material resources more broadly, and in planning exercises to improve the economic situation of a locality” (p. 13). They continue to critique the history of community development in the United States saying that all this apparently equitable advancement must occur within the parameters of free-market capitalism based on competition as well as supply and demand imperatives. Thus, community development arose domestically and internationally as a way to begin addressing the shortcomings and failures of development, particularly its foundational norm based almost exclusively on economic growth indicators.

In these circumstances the ideas of Ivan Illich, a founding figure of the ecology movement, on sustainable development are “nicely co-opted within the conventional discourse of such corporate entities as the World Bank (M. Collins, 1998, p. 184). At the same time, the World Bank and the IMF have played a primary role “in the diversion of funds from popular education initiatives” (M.

Collins, 1998, p. 143), of which the Building Skills, Building Homes Project is an example as well as publicly funded affordable housing.

The notion of development promoted by the World Bank and the IMF means that a “quarter of the world’s population have been left behind and are worse off than they were 15 years ago” (M. Collins, 1998, p. 184). Note that the observation was made over 7 years ago. This situation has likely worsened since that time. In any event, there are disadvantageous consequences of World Bank and IMF policies at the local levels for a large number of people in advanced industrialized countries such as Canada as well as globally. For further critical analysis along these lines of the role of the IMF and the World Bank, see Chomsky (1999) and Herman and Chomsky (1994).

Canada

Other industrialized countries also adopted the mandate of development. In Canada, it is the perspective of community development workers (Ng et al., 1990; Wharf & Clague, 1997) who indicate that development has ideally been the pursuit of equitable distribution of power and resources. On the contrary they assert such power distribution has not been the case:

Canada is a patriarchal society in which a relatively few men rule in their own interests. If this ruling arrangement does not apply with regard to the ordinary issues as completely as it does to the grand issues of social policy, it is only because ordinary issues do not disturb the overall distribution of wealth and power. (p. 3)

However caustic this statement might sound, it gives an indication of the extent to which inequality is perceived in our supposedly egalitarian country.

Other authors who have dealt with the issue of development in Canada include Scott et al (1998), Pierce and Dale (1999), and Lotz (1998). Nevertheless, most problematic in day-to-day “development” work is the continued split in government departments that deal exclusively with economic aspect and social concerns of development within an economic framework.

In Canada, the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE) takes up the economic development agenda, thus providing an overall descriptor of “regional development” that pertains to those state initiatives and policies which are “explicitly designed to reduce economic disparities between and within Canada’s regions” (MacNeil, 1997). Even though there are parallel human development agencies such as Human Resources and Skills Development Canada - HRSDC (formerly Manpower and Immigration and, later, Employment and Immigration Canada), there is still unwillingness on the part of the state to join the two economic-based developmental agencies. Albeit, HRSDC’s objective was economic, and the route taken was through social change measures (often with community involvement) where progress was judged in human and social terms, it was kept separate from Regional Economic Development, whose mandate was also economic development but who relied solely on economic instruments and indicators (MacNeal, 1997, p. 152). In relation to the Building Skills, Building Homes Project the kind of community involvement, decision-making, and collaboration, both on individual and organizational levels, was definitely a challenge to current HRSDC management.

In the end, neither DREE nor HRSDC meet the needs of the community. People at the grassroots of social concerns have responded to such discrepancies with the creation of community-based organizations (CBOs) and coalitions whose basic mandate is to address essential social needs, such as food, housing, poverty, human rights, ecology, and safety. These CBOs and community individuals were the basis of the grassroots approach to the Building Skills, Building Homes Project.

International Voices

Many people whose lives and livelihoods were directly affected by the economic development initiatives, pre- and post-World War II, are slowly being heard by those of us working inside the development framework. Writers such as Dore & Mars (1981), Prakash & Esteva (1998), and Saunders (2002) express what happens when development becomes the apparent saviour. One writer in particular, Fredrique Apffel-Marglin (1998b), in her book *The Spirit of Regeneration: Andean Culture Confronting Western Notions of Development*, gives a passionate and clear picture of what happened to her and her community in the name of economic development. Basically, development was “a promise to support democratic economic relations between the USA and the Third World” (Saunders, 2002, p. 2) for the benefit of the United States; but this promise was not kept.

Fredrique Apffel-Marglin (1998) shares how people from peasant backgrounds, like herself, were given unique opportunities in the late 1950s to

early 1960s to access university training in such areas as agriculture, engineering, and other applied sciences to “man the development effort” (p. 2). They truly believed their people needed help and that this would help them, but in the course of their development work they slowly realized that something was going awry. They tried different programs, approaches, and methodologies but with little success or improvement. They realized that they failed to capture the reality of Andean peasant agriculture and that to change it simply to increase productivity or develop better cash export crops was erroneous. For Apffel-Marglin and her cohorts came the awareness that:

. . . development consisted of a package of practices, ideas, epistemologies and ontologies that came from the modern West and were profoundly alien to the native peasantry. . . They became aware that it is only from the perspective of development, which makes one wear modern Western lenses, that peasant agriculture and culture looks backward, stagnant and altogether lacking. (p. 3)

Yet for the peasants their way of life had profound meaning, beauty, validity, and sustenance. People like Appfel-Marglin realized this vital shift in perspective and along with others who now had over twenty years of professional involvement in the “development agenda” and along with the loss of their jobs in the downsizing recession of the 1980s, had to admit that development had failed. The situation is clearly captured by Apffel-Marglin:

The physical evidence of failure lay scattered throughout the Peruvian landscape – what some have called “the archaeology of development” – in the ruined infrastructures, abandoned to the elements after the project officials had left, uncared for by the peasants for whom they were intended, and simply left to rot. (p. 3)

Their response to this realization was the creation of a group of like-minded people but with varied disciplines, called PRATEC (Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas, Andean Project of Peasant Technologies), intent on learning actual Andean culture and agriculture. Andean agriculture, which comes from 10,000 years of experience, has an “incredible richness and diversity of cultivars that are grown in this ecologically extremely variable environment” (p. 3). For example, the peasants grow a diverse array of plants, with over 3,500 varieties of potatoes alone.

Madhu Prakash and Gustavo Esteva (1998) concur with this type of response to development (and its close relative, globalism) is happening in large and small forums, in a truly worldwide fashion:

Rather than globalization, we sense emerging forms of localization; rather than urbanization, ruralization; rather than modernization and individualization, recovery of the present and the commons. If that is what is happening among the social majorities, as we believe, it suggests that ordinary people are using the turbulence of a dying era to go in a thousand different directions; away from the dominant discourse of “a good life,” managed and molded by the experts of the establishment. (p. 129)

Therefore, the fallacy of development as the panacea is exposed by international voices. Notions of development, and its concurrent notions of science and progress, have affected many levels of society. As noted in the methods chapter, methods of research have been impacted and influenced by more community-based research models. Such community-based and participatory models are being implemented by the example of PRATEC; the people are reclaiming their indigenous knowledge of their land. Development's

agenda has also affected First Nation's people in North America and they have similar struggles to validate their life, land, and livelihoods.

Indigenous Voices

Just as people outside industrialized countries, many of whom are native to their lands, were influenced by the development agenda, so to were Indigenous peoples affected within the "advanced" countries. Only recently are more and more groups articulating their experience and response to the imposition of development on their lands and way of life, as mentioned by LaDuke (2002) in Chapter 4. Kathleen Absolon and Elaine Herbert (1997) voice their critique of development as follows:

. . . [Development] models from the past create images of "outsiders" coming into a community and voyeuristically engaging in some form of community manipulation. [Development] also implies that "underdevelopment" exists, and that "development" must occur in ways similar to those in the Third World. This implication of "underdevelopment" is an example of how language from the dominant society implies superiority over the "developing" subordinate community that needs help. (p. 206)

Clearly, there is a tendency in development to do to one's own what is being done to others. Many Indigenous writers concerned with development are also clear about the effects of colonialism (Absolon & Herbert, 1997). They claim that colonialism is not dead and that imperialism, in the form of the neo-liberal agenda of development and globalism, is continuing to oppress them (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Thus, it is important to make clear at this point that the distinction between the use of the term “development” and the use of the concept of development is one that has caused much confusion and frustration. From the beginning the terms “development” and “economic development” have not only been described but analyzed and critiqued. The main assessment of development has been its excessive and sometimes exclusive emphasis on progress through economic means, especially through the formulas of the West. Swantz and Tripp (1996) confirm the failure of development from both Indigenous and international perspectives:

Perhaps the greatest fallacy of the development ideology is that it relegated people who adhered to traditional beliefs and practices to being passive receptacles of progress, denying them agency in their own lives, and refusing to recognize their own choices and rationales for asserting these preferences. (p. 44)

As development initiatives became problematic, there was a response from the other side of development – the social side, the side of the people, and the side of communities. The next section will examine the forms and formation of community development.

Shifting to Community Development and Community Education

One could say that the community has responded to its own social and economic needs from the beginning of time. Up until modernity, communities were largely self-sustaining entities, taking care of their own social affairs and

meeting their own economic needs. Industrialization, with its roots in Roman social order and the Christian religion, had the adverse effect of creating dichotomies, such as rural and urban. With more centralized governments the job of redistribution of wealth and resources became more controlled. However, community's power to choose its own courses of action diminished more and more, first with colonialism and then, most significantly, with development. As such, "community development" has become a term and a practice that is often ambiguous and can range from complete adherence to the development agenda to an authentic thrust of community controlled efforts.

Community development at one end of a continuum is seen as a bureaucratic institutionalization of those collective actions meant to "improve" a community's material or social life (Dore & Mars, 1981). Community development here is experienced as being co-opted by development standards. At the other end of the spectrum, community development is seen as local actions taken to assume their own power to remedy social and economic needs. In Canada, Wharf & Clague (1997) acknowledge that the terms and the practices are many and varied:

Community development is still used as a synonym for locality development and grassroots organizing, and in common usage it is even more inclusive and subsumes social action, community organization, and social reform. (p. 11)

They recommend that the term "community work" might be more appropriate, but few organizations or writers have adopted this change. Notwithstanding, community development although beginning with grassroots actions, is often

seen to have been co-opted by the larger development agenda for its own uses (Christenson & Robinson, 1980, p. 19).

A grassroots approach is definitely how the American community development network perceives itself (Christenson & Robinson, 1980). They define community development as follows:

(1) A group of people (2) in a community (3) reaching a decision (4) to initiate a social action process (i.e., planned intervention) (5) to change (6) their economic, social, cultural, or environmental situation. (p. 12)
[Numbers in parenthesis refer to topics taken up in subsequent chapters]

It is interesting that these community development workers do not align themselves with the UN definition due to its emphasis on “government control, national progress, and self-help” (p. 13). In fact they are quite critical of economic development initiatives and see them as development in or on the community. They prefer an approach where “programs seek to improve the decision-making process of the community” (p. 13).

Likewise, many Aboriginal peoples, both locally and internationally, are very clear about where they draw the line on community development, both in its terminology and concepts. Aboriginal people view community development as a mark of continued colonial and imperialist actions that oppress and subjugate them. This view is held by such writers as Absolon and Herbert (1997), Saunders (2002), Tuhwai-Smith (1999), hooks (1981), LaDuke (1999), and many others. Many non-Aboriginal writers also witness to the oppression and show support, as well as argue for alternatives. Among these are, for example, Sachs (1999), Grimm (2001), and Poelzer & Poelzer (1986).

One term that is beginning to gain ground as an alternative to community development is “community-based organizations” which clearly places the emphasis of these groups to work with the people in the community. It seems to be a recent term, as it is not mentioned in such books as Wharf & Clague’s *Community Organizing: Canadian Experiences* (1997). The term “community-based” is also linked to specific actions taken with various and diverse partners. For example, see the article “Building Community Partnerships: an Australian Case Study of Sustainable Community-Based Rural Programs” (Packer et al., 2002). This is also the case for partners and individuals involved with the Building Skills, Building Homes Project.

Similarly, the issues of alliance with or distance from “development” are also found in notions of community education. Many adult educators have taken up this issue in their writing, theorizing, and practice. Education is often viewed as a cornerstone of society and its many formal, informal, and non-formal modes of learning are affected by the impact of development. Community educators (Galbraith, 1990; Lovett et al., 1983; M. Mayo, 1997; Scott et al., 1998; Tett, 1996; Wildemeersch et al., 1998) align themselves with the social and critical learning theories and practice within notions of community development.

Lyn Tett offers a useful analysis of community education that works in ways which, at the extremes, emphasize either liberation or social control (Tett,

1996). She bases her analysis on three approaches to community education, best presented with examples of each:

Functional literacy skills targeted at particular jobs (market model); [provisionally designed programs that] offer a second chance for those who need it most, typically seen to be people in disadvantaged areas (progressive-liberal-welfare model); [or] work with groups on addressing the conditions which have given rise to social and economic inequalities (social redistribution model). (p. 20)

The market model is definitely espoused by the proponents of the World Bank agenda as noted above. They base their understanding of education on the production of knowledge for greater monetary gain and on the assumption of a factor called “human capital”:

The importance of the “human factor” in modern production is reflected in the distribution of income among people who own physical capital and people who “own” knowledge and skills. . . . Most human capital is built up through education or training that increases a person’s economic productivity – that is enables him or her to earn a higher income. (p. 43)

This is not the only, or the most important, aspect of the goals of education or knowledge sharing amongst humanity, or non-humans for that matter.

Marjorie Mayo (1997) wrestles with this reality, and in light of failing Marxist types of socialism, she explores a social “transformative” approach to education in the community and the workplace. This social transformation is built on:

. . . debates [that] focus upon the possibilities for both individual and collective action to promote forms of economic and social development which are effectively geared towards combating poverty and deprivation and towards the enhancement of social justice and equal opportunities. (p. 10)

As well, social transformation must also progress by raising critical consciousness. Ewart and Grace (2000) and Wildemeersch et al. (1998) take up this discourse and explore ways that include an analysis of the political, economic, and social factors that impact on adult education in communities.

The Eco-Connection and Sustainable Development

The latest factor to be included in the development schema is the environment. Even though the failure of development in human terms was and continues to be greatly minimized, the ecological crisis is one component that has been given some attention by the powerful development engine and its industry, finance, and business drivers.³² Some people view sustainable development as the alternative model of development; others regard it as a cop-out for truly addressing sustainability issues, including ecology, culture, and the power distribution that affects both.

Advocating for sustainable development as an option, the World Bank defines it in Soubotina and Sheram (2000) as follows:

“A process of managing a portfolio of assets to preserve and enhance the opportunities people face.” The assets that this definition refers to include not just traditionally accounted physical capital, but also natural

³². Note, for example, the Kyoto Accord, entered into force on 21 March 1994 by 189 countries as of May 2004. <http://unfccc.int/resource/convkp.html>.

and human capital. To be sustainable, development must provide for all these assets to grow over time – or at least not to decrease. (p. 95)

Clearly, sustainability for development proponents does not mean ecological management; it barely mentions it at all. This book is definite evidence that not much has really changed in the development agenda. At best, the kind of sustainable development this approach would support would be an individualistic, behaviourist-based approach advocated by writers like Doug McKenzie Mohr and William Smith (1999), who state the following:

Community-based social marketers identify the benefits and barriers to behaviors and then organize the public into groups, or “segments,” which have common characteristics, in order that the delivery of programs that can be made most efficient. (p. 3)

This approach, however, sounds controlling and driven by monetary indicators.

Such a stance spurs on continuous writing by researchers and workers in ecological sustainability. They are convinced that the industrial and human impact on the earth has grown into a state of crisis. The ecological disaster warning comes mainly from modernity’s pursuit of progress at the expense of all things human and non-human. William Rees (2003) states that we have “overshot our ecological footprint” and that “human demand already exceeds the long-term carrying capacity of the planet by 20 percent or more (Rees 1996, 2002; Wackernagel et al. 1999; World Wide Fund for Nature, 2002)” (p. 88). Even naturalists are concerned about the implications of their “wildlife conservation” approaches (Russell, 1994).

Indigenous people constantly and clearly remain steadfast in their awareness of our interaction with non-human systems. Perhaps they have learned enough about Western ways now Westerners have much to learn about the world and how we are to be in relationship with it. Winona LaDuke (1999) states that "there is a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity" (p. 1). For the Aboriginal environmentalist, grassroots and land-based struggles are characterized with the following mandate:

Our traditional laws lead us to understand that economic development cannot subsist on a deteriorating resource base. The environment cannot be maintained and protected when "growth" does not account for the cost of environmental and cultural destruction. (p. 200)

It remains to be seen how even the ecologically aware utilize this knowledge. Such insight and sentiment is reiterated by Prakash (1994) in an article applauding Wendell Berry, "given the earth's nature, it is impossible for four-fifths of the world's population to adopt the style of life, the patterns of production and consumption, of the minority – the citizens of developed nations, as well as the social elites of the underdeveloped ones" (p. 145).

Education is another system that has taken on environmental awareness raising with surprising momentum in promoting curriculum but with few applications beyond the classroom. Conferences for educators and researchers did not address environmental issues until very recently. A survey of titles, themes, and keywords indicate that ecological or environmental education has not been an issue until the late 1990s (n.a., 1997; Sork et al., 2000; Taylor &

Bedard, 1992). However, the 1992 edition of *Convergence* (1992), a journal with many international submissions, dealt with issues of sustainability, ecology, and education over 10 years ago. Nevertheless, since environmental education has come on the scene, whole volumes of journals have taken up the ecological cause, including *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (Hill & Clover, 2003) and the *Community Development Journal* (2002). Another stream of educational thought, lifelong learning, has taken up the linkages between community development, education, environment, and lifelong-learning initiatives (Aspin, 2001). It remains to be seen what kind of impact the environmentalist teachings, as a basis for sustainable development, will have on classroom learners of today and in the generations to come.

Yet even in the face of this advancement, community educators are wary of sustainable development's agenda and how it is really not addressing ecological issues but sidestepping them in the name of more progress. Bob Jickling (1994) confirms this apprehension when he identifies the concern that "efforts to implement sustainable development will obscure understanding of the economic, political, philosophical and epistemological roots of environmental issues, and adequate examinations of social alternatives" (p. 232). Such concerns are reiterated by other writers such as Mische (1992), Sumner (2002), Hill and Clover (2003), Bhasin (1992), Mayo (1997), Naidoo (2001), Prakash (1994), Rees (2003), and Orr (1999).

If “sustainable development” is not the term that adequately, clearly, and succinctly captures the reality of the need then it is imperative to devise terms and concepts that can be readily understood and applied to appropriate strategies. The term “community sustainability” fills this language and conceptual requirement.

Shifts in Understandings: Making the Links to Community Sustainability

This section will look at those writers who are talking about and linking together different disciplines, not as a cross-disciplinary pursuit, but as a reality in their work and lifeworld. Numerous writers (Grim, 2001; Prakash, 1995; Sachs et al., 1998; Wildemeersch et al., 1998), although not using the term “community sustainability” have made such connections. Also, other writers (Bhasin, 1992; Community Development Journal, 2002) have used the term “sustainable development” but with a definite link to community-based activity. For me, “community sustainability” does not speak to an agenda, like development, but to those actions that make us who we are – a community that is self-enduring, diverse, and interdependent, striving for balance and pacing our progress. It is just such a community as this that the participants and

stakeholders of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project were trying to succeed in their learning and experiencing.

Community sustainability is about place. Jennifer Sumner (2003), the only adult education author who uses this term, states, "community sustainability is an issue of local importance with global implications" (p. 39). Through her writing and experience she attempts to address what our cultural response is to issues in our locale. It is not about catching up with the rest of the world but setting the boundaries, making the links, and taking action to meet our own needs. Such community sustainability indicates an interdependent relationship with other places, not a need to control others to maintain our lifestyle. We do not need to copy the regeneration of culture and life in the Andes, but we can learn, support, and gain hope from their efforts.

Community sustainability is about learning. Sumner (2003) links education to community and place warning of the pitfalls of privatization at all levels of education where it is "no longer a human right, but a commodity for sale to those who can afford it" (p. 41). Jickling (1994) states the options very clearly:

For we who are educators the task is not to "educate for sustainable development." If we wish students to think intelligently about environmental issues it simply does not make sense to allow our educative efforts to be subsumed by such prescriptive thinking. In a rapidly changing world we must enable students to debate, evaluate, and judge for themselves the relative merits of contesting positions. There is a world of difference between these two possibilities. The latter approach is about education: the former is not. (p. 239)

Part of the learning that needs to happen is openness to First Nation's knowledge with a proper attitude of humility, respect, and silence. White people are notorious for questioning the answers they get and not hearing the answers to questions needing to be asked. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) views sharing knowledge as a long-term commitment as opposed to researchers who take much and give little in return:

By taking this approach seriously it is possible to introduce communities and people who may have little formal schooling to a wider world, a world which includes people who think just like them, who share in their struggles and dreams and who voice their concerns in similar sorts of ways. (p. 16)

Community sustainability is about action. First, action is collective and purposeful. For example, many peoples are in the process of taking back their traditional homelands through treaty land entitlement claims and other land claims. Sometimes that action is silent, as in the instance of the Andean people, who have taken over the haciendas by direct action without political or other associations (Frédérique & Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas, 1998). Action can be loud and violent as in South Africa or action can be legal as in First Nations land claims processes in Canada. Next, action suggests rates of speed. David Orr (2002) retells a fascinating anecdote:

Several days after the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, an Amish friend of mine with a well-developed sense of humor called from a pay phone to inform me that no Amish person was involved in the crime. I responded by saying that I was not particularly surprised. "Good," he replied, "I just wanted to clarify that in your mind." After a pause he added: "You know if the Amish were involved, the getaway buggy would have been blown up." (p. 5)

If the horse is the primary mode of transportation, it sets limits to the havoc that can be created. Leading from this insight, Orr asks what would our “functional equivalent of the horse [be] in order to become sustainable?” (p. 5), meaning what are the mechanisms that would pace our progress promoting mindfulness of the environment.

Finally, action is starting from a different entry point. For example, Grimaldo Rengifo Vasquez (1998) shares about the Ayllu in the Andes Mountains of Peru:

In the ayllu the activity of its members is not modelled from the outside, it is not the product of a planning act that transcends it, but rather it is a result of the conversations that take place between the community of humans (runas), the communities of huacas (deities), and the natural communities (sallqa), in a brotherly atmosphere of profound equivalency. (p. 89)

In this way the people are informed as to the action they need to take in order to maintain a comfortable level of sustenance. At the other end of the world, we can be informed by the activity of Alaskan Native peoples, who are viewed to be the “original ecologists”:

One reason for this is that their worldviews are dependent upon reciprocity – do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. All of life is considered recyclable and therefore requires certain ways of caring in order to maintain the cycle. (p. 9)

“Others” here includes beings that are non-human. The forms of place, learning, and action are not the only indicators of community sustainability but they are one arrangement to begin the process of creatively and critically thinking our response to reinhabiting our Earth (Mische, 1992).

This chapter reviewed selected literature from several writers of development, community development, community education, and sustainable development. In addition, it presented some thoughts on a new concept called “community sustainability”, tracking the shifts in the concept and practice of development from a purely economic push to a social and community driven entity to an awareness of things environmental. Education is also a central component, not only in terms of community education and how it has picked up on the concept and practice of development but also on its critique and alternatives. Finally, we have heard the voices of the Indigenous peoples, locally and internationally, for it is their way that will ultimately survive because they have the history and skills to listen, reflect, and act on a relationship with the land.

CHAPTER SIX: Implications for Community Sustainability: Linkages, Limits, and Locality

Hesitant, he does not utter words lightly. When his task is accomplished and his work done the people all say, "It happened to us naturally."

Taoist ideal
(Orr, 1992, p. 79)

Perhaps the poem quoted at the beginning of this thesis is a derivative of this Taoist saying. Be that as it may, our experience of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project speaks to the kind of understanding this poem evokes. The project brought together individuals interested in seeking enduring ways to live in our communities and it initiated relationships among diverse partners. This project exemplified a pattern of human dynamics and social interaction that connects what is ecologically sound with current modes of living in a complicated process that necessitated new kinds of community education relationships. As a case study, this thesis concentrates on a single phenomenon. Sharan Merriam (1998) defines "case study" as the concentration on an entity, a case where, "the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (p. 29). In this way, this thesis explores the ecologically friendly lifestyles promoted by the project and it

investigates the interconnectedness between affordable housing, learning, and culture as they relate to community sustainability. This notion draws its meaning from an historical context, that is, the implementation of a systemic and powerful policy of economic development. On the heels of colonialism's demise, development adversely affected many peoples worldwide. However, many peoples actively pursue their own community response to sustaining their livelihoods. More recently, groups of people are including ecological awareness and actions in their efforts to maintain autonomy; they are linking their concerns about the environment to their community's well being.

Having recapped the points made throughout this thesis, it is opportune to accentuate further implications and applications of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project through a framework of the linkages, limits, and locality of community sustainability. The first section discusses how this project could be viewed as a grassroots initiative, aligning with the goals and framework of the newly formed educational policy called School ^{Plus}. Implications for this project's inclusion in social realities revolve around the discourse for an ecological pedagogy and our readiness to act upon solutions are addressed in the final two sections.

Chapter 4 argues that the ability of one experience, as in the Building Skills, Building Homes Project, affecting numerous issues or aspects of community and living is the praxis of community sustainability. Praxis is the continuing and intersecting cycle of action and reflection. First the project was

planned and then acted upon. Time passed that allowed for reflection after which Sarah and I undertook a dialogue regarding the project. Within the thesis, this dialogical action, as well as the project itself became new points for reflection. An opportunity to develop an ever-widening spiral of community sustainability on the personal, communal/local, and international levels was the result. In this conclusion, the focus is once again brought back to the local. How can an understanding of community sustainability spur further action and reflection in our locale?

Linkages

The Building Skills, Building Homes Project was a community sustainability initiative, which is very much in line with the aims, philosophy, and vision of the Saskatchewan School ^{Plus} policy document. School ^{Plus}: A Vision for Children and Youth: The Final Report of the Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School to the Minister of Education, Government of Saskatchewan (Tymchak, 2001) is a recent policy statement that addresses the role of the school in society today. Among other directives aimed at off-loading excess work and non-schooling expectations from teachers and administration, this document states the need for inclusive approaches to education and schooling by exploring the relationships between educational systems, human-service agencies, and community-based organizations. In particular, the

document calls for “a public policy initiative that encompasses all of the human services, and third party and community agencies as well (italics in text)”

(Tymchak, 2001, p. 52). The Building Skills, Building Homes Project included all these agencies and attempted a participatory partnership to meet the needs of young people who were having difficulty with school-to-career transitions.

The way the School ^{Plus} policy proposes to implement interagency initiatives is to involve the public with the school. It specifically takes the existing precedent of the Community School, of which there are numerous designated sites in both urban and rural centres in Saskatchewan. The philosophy of the Community School is to “collaborate with community members to strengthen both the school and the community in which the school is located” (p. 142). The Community School structure advocated by the School ^{Plus} recommendations seeks to systematize a natural situation where a school is inclusive of all society members, open to citizen input, and actively solicits programming or events to meet local needs. Many Community Schools see this outreach as a sharing of resources and management of public concerns that distributes expectations and solutions to all members of the community, thereby allowing the educators to better focus on their teaching mandate. This model is significantly different than more economic and management-based schooling models being pursued in other areas of Canada and the United States. The School ^{Plus} policy difference can be seen in the approach to youth dropouts,

such as was the situation of some of the Building Skills, Building Homes participants:

Clearly, if the hidden youth issue is to be addressed, it will require a multi-faceted interagency approach. All aspects of the problem need to be confronted, including the underlying issues of community development and the human 'fallout' of a globalized economy that has placed an inordinately high priority on corporate cost-efficiency at the expense of human and social costs. (p. 83)

Community schools essentially promote human development and a learning atmosphere, in and out of the school building and beyond the K – 12 classroom structure. The Building Skills, Building Homes Project extended beyond the graded classroom system in that it was hands-on learning at two field sites, it involved young women, some of whom had not completed high school, and it involved women in non-traditional trades. This project was also about a unique partnering of educational, human service, and community-based groups who desired to explore more enduring lifestyles within the context of housing, construction skills, and energy efficient lifestyle options. As Chapter 4 illustrated these are factors involved in appropriate and affordable housing, which is listed as one interconnecting condition that meets the goals of School^{Plus} (n.a., n.d.).³³

The Building Skills, Building Homes Project exemplified the interaction of numerous partner agencies and their localized response to ecological, cultural, learning, and social issues that School^{Plus} encourages.

³³ For more information please refer to the *School^{Plus}* web site, http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/branches/cap_building_acct/school_plus/unit/index.shtml.

School^{Plus} invites relationships with community and government bodies that go beyond the K – 12 classroom setting. Perhaps this is what is meant in the introductory comments to the recommendations:

The answer to this dilemma of the role of the school, and the apparent competition between public education and the other needs of children [and youth], should be met not by asking 'schools' as they are presently constituted to do more and more but, rather, by creating a new environment altogether. (p. 44)

The Building Skills, Building Homes Project was such a venture, bringing together young women who had not succeeded in the regular system or were having difficulty making the transition from school to work settings and giving them an opportunity to learn new skills and broaden their horizons for ecologically sustainable lifestyle options. At the same time, this project linked school, government, and community agencies interested in meeting this need and demonstrates the kind of grassroots initiative that could be further supported by such linkages. David Orr (1992) supports this when he says, "education appropriate for sustainability will give greater emphasis to place-specific knowledge and skills useful in meeting individual local needs and for rebuilding local communities" (p. 146).

Limitations

The future of the community sustainability discourse is fundamentally connected with the development of a pedagogy of ecological responsibility (Mische, 1992). School^{Plus} and its attending infrastructure are the means. However, the intention is to turn upside down the current foundational and structural underpinnings of Western society. Patricia Mische (1992) upholds such vision:

The task is immense. We must do no less than learn to reinhabit the Earth (Berry, 1985). This means learning to live as conscious, participating members of the larger Earth community. The Earth is like a single cell in the universe, and we are not over the cell, but part of her life. We will live or die as this single cell lives or dies. (p. 9)

As stated in the introduction, this examination of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project attended to the barriers and limits that interfere with the learning process of self-sustainable lifestyles. The dynamics of the relationship that formed between the partners as well as the participants was tenuous at times. There were disagreements and tensions that impacted upon the perceived success of the undertaking. However, the project and its intentions are worthwhile and valid not for the external success criteria of completion and numbers, but because of other measures of accomplishment, such as narrative, discourse, and empowerment.

Some say that perhaps too much hope and not enough support are placed in potentially empowering experiences such as this. There are limits to empowerment in adult education, as Robert Regnier and Phillip Penna (1996)

discuss in The limits of empowerment in anti-nuclear advocacy: a case study of adult education for technological literacy:

Much critical adult education theory regards empowerment as making possible practical action that resists, contests, disrupts, opposes, and transforms dominating processes while generating possibilities for alternatives that contribute toward human emancipation (Apple; 1979, Fleming, 1989; Freire, 1971, Giroux, 1983; Weiler, 1988;). (p. 45)

The Building Skills, Building Homes Project was a one-time pilot project, and from the vantage point of co-ordination, the dynamics of the diverse partners to really apply community sustainability was the most challenging aspect. Regnier and Penna (1996) identify increasing technological literacy as that which “empower[s] citizens to increase democratic participation in technological societies” (p. 45) where social change in society is driven by political and economic elites who advance systems that serve their own interests and utilize expertise that build those technologies, such as is the case of governments and business focused predominantly on fossil fuel supplies. Powerful elites support such processes at the expense of other alternatives such as natural-building procedures and solar energy. Whether the technology is nuclear mining and power or natural energy options, the need to become technologically literate is the same. Yet, even though much was learned about the choices, the empowering potential of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project was limited in the end by the self-serving interests of the institutional policies that emphasize cost analysis over human fulfillment. For what is empowerment but the ability to “overcome citizen impotence in democratic

societies where technological developments are proposed, education must advance the citizen as “decision maker” (p. 40). Where those dominating the processes, identified in this case as the working relationships of the partners involved, may have been perceived to limit the overall potential of the project, they did not limit the contribution of the imperatives of the project to the overall discourse and promotion of alternatives. The intentions of the Building Skills, Building Homes Project were to participate in the housing and construction discourse by offering alternative ways of learning (hands-on), living (ecologically sound), and leadership (participatory-action model). In other words, the real success of a program such as the Building Skills, Building Homes Project is in the raising of awareness of viable alternatives that are part of the decision-making processes of the people that will continue to be tested, lived, and promoted. As well, beyond what this thesis can do to advance alternative discourses are the many people and groups who were impacted by this project and who themselves will make life decisions based on this experience. They join a growing movement of ecological activists.

Locality

Yet, are the existing decision-makers, citizens and elite alike, ready to listen, to rekindle the old ways as Sarah Lewis stated? Euro-Canadians are not the only people interested in blending ecological issues with educational and community building arrangements. In fact, we have much to learn from international communities, especially Indigenous peoples who have been re-locating their “development” within their communities of origin. This has been demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5. George J. Sefa Dei (1999) explicitly supports such connections in terms of development:

Debates about ‘development’ must be situated in appropriate social contexts that provide practical and social meaning to the actors as subjects, rather than as objects of development discourse. This is a critical perspective on development: that local communities should own and control the solutions to their own problems (see also Kankwenda, 1994). This critical perspective also recognizes that real and effective control by the local community over the development process is possible only if the development agenda seeks to centre indigenous knowledge systems in the search for solutions to human problems. This means articulating a conception and praxis of development that does not reproduce the existing total local dependency on external advice, knowledge, and resources. (p. 73).

Whether here, in Kenya (Nathani Wane, 2000) , or in Korea, Tanzania, and Mexico (Dore & Mars, 1981), the social context is transformative when Indigenous people, despite being educated in the Western system, experience success as a result of re-strengthening their roots, sharing the indigenous knowledge embedded in their community’s culture, teachings, and lifestyles, as well as deciding what changes benefit their people in our contemporary world.

This is what Sarah is getting at when she speaks about rekindling the old ways. She is talking about reassessing and reaffirming the tribe specific values, traditions, and lifestyles together with choosing life changes either at the personal, family, or community level that are practical and timely.

The potential of community sustainability as identified in this thesis has great hope for social transformation; to continue the “together-living” that understands multi-cultural interaction to be a living dynamic thing. Jennifer Sumner (2003) argues:

Environmental learning can enable a revolution in learning if it is reconceptualized within an understanding of sustainability as a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons. . . [Where the civil commons is] what people ensure together as a society to protect and further life, as distinct from money aggregates. (p. 42 & 44)

Ultimately, community sustainability as an enduring lifestyle such as has been expressed in this thesis requires enduring knowledge. As Marlene Brant Castellano (2000) states:

Sometimes knowledge is received as a gift at a moment of need; sometimes it manifests itself as a sense that ‘the time is right’ to hunt or counsel or to make a decisive turn in one’s life path. . . Sacred knowledge, enduring knowledge, is often described using fire as a metaphor. Art Solomon, an Anishnabe (Ojibway) elder from Ontario, speaks of sifting through the ashes to discover the members from the sacred fire, which when it is rekindled brings the people back to their true purpose. It is the nature of fire that it is ever-changing and has to be fueled by the materials at hand here and now. (p. 24-5)

In this spirit, my dream, along with the dreams of other people, is to build ecologically self-sustainable homes and communities in such a way that respects, honours, and learns from the land as well as the traditions, values,

and cultures of other peoples. The Building Skills, Building Homes Project is an example of how to rekindle that enduring knowledge by reconceptualizing sustainable community development where learning brings people back to their true purpose, which is to sustain this earth together.

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APPENDIX A

Ethics Approval



**UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**

<http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics.shtml>

NAME: Michael Collins (Carol Vandale)
Educational Foundations

Beh #04-107

DATE: September 21, 2004

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study "The Building Skills, Building Homes Project: A Community Education Study in Alternative Lifestyle Practices" (Beh #04-107).

1. Your study was APPROVED on June 11, 2004.
2. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.
3. The term of this approval is for 5 years.
4. This approval is valid for one year. A status report form must be submitted annually to the Chair of the Committee in order to extend approval. This certificate will automatically be invalidated if a status report form is not received within one month of the anniversary date. Please refer to the website for further instructions
<http://www.usask.ca/research/behavrsc.shtml>

I wish you a successful and informative study.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Valerie Thompson', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Valerie Thompson, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

VT/ck

APPENDIX B

Letters of Consent

Informed Consent to Participate:

I appreciate your participation in the research study The Building Skills, Building Homes Project: A Community Education Study in Alternative Lifestyle Practices. This study will explore ways that community educators and learners come to understand how learning experiences can advance the real need for community sustainability.

Your participation in this study will help to illuminate how you retrospectively understood your experience, what you learned from it, and how you see it shaping your life in the future.

In order to protect your interests, I will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. The researcher will interview you to get your initial input to the questions I have listed (see Appendix B). This interview will be approximately one hour. I will tape our discussion.
2. I will write a story and explanation based on the transcripts of our conversation.
3. I will present this story to you in another meeting and we can go over it, adding, deleting, and making changes where you want.
4. I will rewrite the narrative and will go over this and continuing versions until we have a story that we feel reflects our experience, our ideas, and our concerns.
5. The estimated total time commitment will include one or two taped interviews and up to three feedback sessions on the written transcripts.
6. Although there are no risks or deceptions in the study, you may find some questions and talk uncomfortable. If that is the case, arrangements can be made for you to contact counselling services.
7. You can withdraw at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, the data collected from our interviews will be destroyed.
8. Upon completion of the study, all data (transcripts, notes, & journal) will be securely stored and retained by the researcher's supervisor for a minimum of five years with Dr. Michael Collins, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines. These guidelines can be viewed at www.usask.ca.
9. The results of this study will be used in a Master's Thesis. Later, the study might be published as an article in a scholarly journal or presented at a conference. Your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected using pseudonyms unless you want your identity revealed.

I understand that the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has approved this research study on _____ and I agree to participate. I agree to the above guidelines and plan.

Date

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

If you have any further questions about your participation in the study, please call:

Carol Vandale, Graduate Student, Department of Educational Foundations
(home phone: 653-1270)

Dr. Michael Collins, Supervisor, Department of Educational Foundations, 966-7552

Or call the Office of Research Services, University of Saskatchewan at 966-2084 for more information about your rights as a participant.

**I have been given a copy of this consent form for my records.

The Study Questions

1. Based on comments and writings (intake interview) what did you hope to experience and learn in the *Building Skills, Building Homes* project?
2. To what extent did (or did not) your hopes play out?
3. What did you understand of terms such as 'sustainable lifestyles' at the beginning of the project? Did your understanding change with your experience? If so, how?
4. It has almost been a year since the project began, what are your thoughts, concerns, and issues now?
5. How do you see yourself dealing with these issues, inside yourself, with your family, and in your community?
6. When I explain the idea of 'community sustainability' to you, what do you think of that as a way to talk about what you would like to do in the future?
7. What are some strategies you envision within the reality of your life?
8. What are some of the things getting in the way of succeeding in getting to your vision of how you would like to incorporate self-sustainable lifestyle actions in your life?

Transcript/Data Release Form

I, _____ have read the narrative drafts and agree to release them.

I have had the opportunity to read the narrative to clarify, add or delete information so it will accurately represent my words. Carol Vandale has explained the procedure and its possible risks to me, and I understand them.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, that I may choose to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

I also understand that although the data from this study may be published, and/or presented at seminars and/or conferences, my identity can be revealed
_____*(initialed)*

*or it can be kept completely confidential and anonymous.*_____
(initialed)

I understand that the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has approved this research study on _____ and I agree to participate. I agree to the guidelines stated above.

Participant,

Date

Researcher,

Date

**I have been given a copy of this signed form for my records.

Photographic Data Release Form

I, _____ agree to photographs that picture me in this thesis.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, that I may choose to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

I also understand that although the data from this study may be published, and/or presented at seminars and/or conferences, my identity can be revealed _____(initialed)

or it can be kept completely confidential and anonymous. _____(initialed)

I understand that the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has approved this research study on June 11, 2003 and I agree to participate according to the guidelines stated above.

_____	_____
Participant,	Date

_____	_____
Researcher,	Date

**I have been given a copy of this signed form for my records.

APPENDIX C

Sample Group Agreement

Building Skills, Building Homes
2003
Group Agreement

I, _____ (please print name), agree to the following rights, responsibilities, and expectations as clarified by the participants of the Building Skills, Building Homes project.

Rights:

- I will be paid \$6.65 / hour living allowance for either a 32 hour (4 days) or 40 hour (5 days) per week as per the attached pay schedule.
- I agree to the attached pay schedule that lists the contracted amounts that will be paid monthly.
- These amounts will be direct deposited into my account on the dates noted on the pay schedule.
- The living allowance will not include E.I. or C.P.P. contributions / deductions but will include income tax deductions. These deductions will be noted on my record of deposit information.
- I can approach Carol Vandale or Marcia Klein with any concerns I may have with any money concerns. I can also approach Karley Scott, HRDC program officer, with any concerns I may have.

Expectations:

I agree to the following:

- Through the leadership of the Coordinator, Carol Vandale, I agree to work in cooperation with the governmental, aboriginal, community, ecological, and educational partners involved with this project.
- to participate to the best of my ability to assist in the construction of two straw bale buildings, as directed by the various teacher-builders, apprentice builders and site managers, including following all safety procedures. It will be the responsibility of these resource people and the leaders to give clear and distinct directions to the best of their ability.
- to participate in all skill development activities and learning workshops to the best of my ability,.

- to participate in conducting interpretive sessions to school-age children at Brightwater Science and Environmental Centre
- to helping organize, prepare and conduct the wrap-up workshop to be held in October for all the stakeholders involved in this project.
- to participate in the career planning and job search workshops and activities the times noted in the attached calendar.
- to promote team building attitude amongst my peers and leaders through respect, communication, compassion, care, and fun.
- to participate in evaluations, group discussions, talking circles, and meetings to the best of my ability. I reserve the right to pass and am aware that my non-participation is my choice and in fact another way of participating
- to give due notice of sickness or appointments when I am not able to be in attendance, and committing to work with the Coordinator to make up for time lost to the best of my ability and the constraints of the project's timeline.

Responsibilities:

I agree to the following:

- A basic day equals 8 hours of work not including lunch, but including two - 15 minute breaks.
- During the construction periods of this project, including Nut Mountain (Shell Lake) and Brightwater the workday can be flexible with early mornings, afternoon siestas, and some evening work. Attention will be given to overtime and time off will be given on site - however unless the whole group has put in enough overtime I agree to the possibility of not coming home a day early (for example on a Thursday)
- Any sick days or days off can be made up in extra hours on site
- The workday includes food preparation for those assigned the duty for that day. However, once food is prepared the cooking partners are expected to fulfill other duties (such as cleaning).
- I agree to be on time for departures and work schedules. If I miss any rides, I agree to find my own way to the site.

- Workshops are workdays, however I agree to being flexible on taking more time
- Talking circles are not part of the workday, but I agree to attend, as they are important to the health of the group. I agree that these be held two times per week throughout the construction periods unless otherwise requested by the group. Talking circles do not include group meetings - that time needed for organizing menus, house keeping duties, scheduling, and other issues
- Ceremonies are completely optional, however, talks given by elders are considered workshops and require my attendance
- Ness Creek Music Festival is not optional and is considered 12 hours of work time (the same time allotted for entry as a volunteer).
- Other workshops and events that arise and chosen by the group are also not optional (for example Arnold's Earth Oven Workshop) but are considered an 8-hour workday (whether or not it takes 8 or more hours) - these are opportunities to make up work hours.
- I agree to be completely responsible for my own gear. Labeling is not required but highly recommended.
- I agree to work in teams, not necessarily with the same person, for cooking, cleaning and organizational duties.
- I agree to discuss any concerns I have with another person. If that other person is not able to help or resolve the issue then I agree to go to another person until the issue is resolved (that may mean another group member, leader or teacher). As a member of this group I agree that if I am unable to help resolve another person's concerns or conflict, I am honest with them and encourage them to go to the appropriate person.
- I agree that any major conflicts, emergencies and issues will be taken to the Coordinator, Carol Vandale and to assist in helping in any way I can

Signature

Date